FREE WORLD CUP GUIDE PART ONE INSIDE

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Barca's new golden boy

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Munich or Madrid?

MOURINHO'S WAY

The world according to Jose and Inter

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Part one

South Africa 2010: all the contenders

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February 2010

HAPPY NEW YEAR! It's a year which promises to be a hugely momentous one for *World Soccer* as we celebrate our 50th anniversary. No other British or English-language football magazine has come close to matching our half-century of continuous publication, so please excuse me if we are slightly self-indulgent over the coming 12 months.

The 50 years of our existence, from 1960 to 2010, span the history of the modern game. So, over the next few months, we're going to take the opportunity to look back over half a century of football, starting this month with our selection of the 50 coaches who have been the most influential over the past 50 years.

The list (page 50) is bound to provoke debate, but it is worth pointing out that is not a list of the greatest managers of all time. We have excluded such pre-war managers as Vittorio Pozzo and Herbert Chapman, as well as men such as Guzstav Sebes, who carried on working into the 1960s, but whose greatest achievement – the Mighty Magyars side – pre-dated what is generally considered to be football's modern era.

It's impossible to come up with a specific date for the start of that era, when technological developments such as television and foreign plane travel opened football's horizons, and serious international competition became a reality.

However, the 1960 European Cup Final between Real Madrid and Eintracht Frankfurt – considered by many to have been the greatest club game ever – is widely considered to have been the catalyst for the launch of *World Soccer* in October 1960.

Also enclosed in this issue is part one of our 2010 World Cup guide. Hopefully, as with previous tournaments, you will find it useful in the countdown to the finals in June.

GAVIN HAMILTON, Editor
gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com

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The global game caught on camera

Snow go...volunteers try in vain to clear the snow in Bologna before their game with Atalanta fell foul to the big freeze that decimated fixtures throughout Europe

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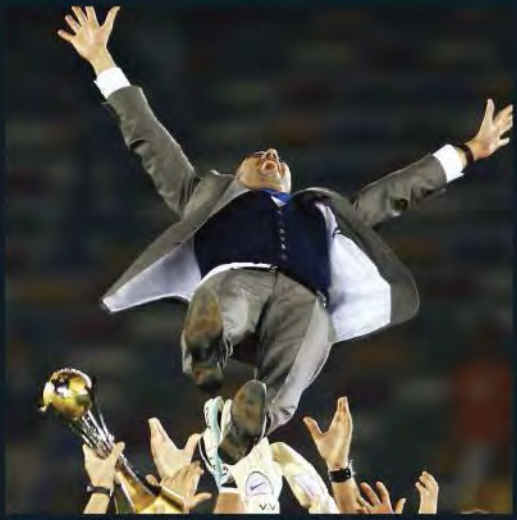

Pep flies again...Barca boss Guardiola celebrates a unique six trophies out of six

Nacional heroes...Paraguay's league winners find a novel way to celebrate

Red mist...TP Mazembe goalkeeper Muteba Kidiaba is distraught after being sent off against Auckland City in the Club World Cup

Hot dog...Bayern president Uli Hoeness serves food to fans before a home game

Jack-in-the-box...Carlos Tevez scores for Manchester City against Stoke City

Sunnier climes...in Australia, Central Coast Mariners entertained Melbourne Victory (in white) against a backdrop of palm trees at the Bluetongue stadium in twilight temperatures of 24°C

Brian Glanville

...on Mancini's arrival at Manchester City...another Ferguson outburst...Arsenal's embarrassment of riches...Pompey in trouble...Ancelotti's Cech conundrum...and Hyppia's revival

City united...Mancini (right) with Bellamy

NOW that the smoke has cleared, and even garrulous Garry Cook has been reduced to silence, one can say that while Manchester City's sacking of Mark Hughes, which raised such a storm, was callously and surreptitiously done, it may not have been a mistake.

The appointment of Roberto Mancini, who it transpired had been courted well before City went down 3-0 at Tottenham Hotspur – the alleged motive for Hughes' expulsion – at first looked a manifest game plan, yet it seems to have worked out well. In the last two games under Hughes, City's wretched defence let through half a dozen goals; in the first three matches under Mancini, none.

Mancini seems to have won over the reported rebels in the squad, notably Craig Bellamy, who has been playing with dynamism and effect. Not that such a rapprochement seemed likely when, in his opening game against Stoke City, Mancini fruitlessly preferred the recalcitrant Robinho on the left flank, though Bellamy did come on with panache after 70 minutes. But even before this, Mancini, his arm around Bellamy's shoulders on the bench, seemed to be on good terms with the Welshman.

For the next match, won 3-0 at Wolverhampton Wanderers, it was Bellamy who very properly started, and who in the second half was profitably moved from the wing to an attacking role just behind the equally dynamic Carlos Tevez.

The subsequent match at Middlesbrough in the FA Cup saw Mancini initially field a scratch team, though Tevez, Bellamy and Gareth Barry all did appear in the second half. That, against a team deprived of any hope when its best attacker, Adam Johnson, limped off in the first half, saw a third clean sheet attained.

THERE is, alas, a wretched inevitability about Alex Ferguson's outbursts after his team has lost a game, even though he admitted that Leeds United deserved their FA Cup victory at Old Trafford. "The referee gave five minutes [added time]," he inveighed. "That is an insult to the game and the players out there."

> "There is a wretched inevitability about Alex Ferguson's outbusts"

Oh, come on, and calm down! Anyway, which players did he mean? Surely not those of Leeds who, leading through a spectacular goal by Jermaine Beckford, would doubtless have been more than delighted to have had no time added at all. As it was, Leeds surpassed themselves and did colossal credit to their young, locally born manager, Simon Grayson. It was properly pointed out that they spurned negative, defensive, abrasive football, but went out to play with pace, enterprise and skill.

Time wasters...Manchester United (in red) miss another chance against Leeds

True, Manchester United, for most of the game, were hardly at full strength, but whose fault was that? By the time Antonio Valencia, Ryan Giggs and Michael Owen – who was guilty of an awful miss – came on, Leeds had a grip on the game. And when the home side did threaten to equalise, Leeds' admirable Danish goalkeeper, Casper Ankergren, was bravely and athletically equal to any demands.

Perhaps the reason for Leeds' apparent metamorphosis from a Third Division side (yes, I know all about the current, misleading, categories) into one of Premier League quality was precisely because they were up against a famous Premier League team. Thus they played the kind of sophisticated football of which they are capable, rather than the type they need against teams they face week by week who espouse a cruder and more basic style.

After the game, Grayson spoke somewhat wistfully of the almost inevitability of losing Beckford to a higher, richer club, if not in the January sales, then in the coming summer. I hope that doesn't happen. At Old Trafford, Beckford took his goal superbly, with courage, pace and deserved success. Clearly he'd be irreplaceable though. There is plenty of other talent in the side, but a born goalscorer is a rare and precious asset.

Should Leeds be promoted, as they surely will be, there is every chance that they could also rise from the so-called Championship, though you could hardly blame Beckford were he to seek fame at a more lucrative level. After all, at just 26, he is hardly a tyro.

HOW odd to find Arsene Wenger, that repository of wisdom, succumbing suddenly to what one might only call

a moment of sheer Blatterism by bizarrely advocating that the throw-in be replaced by the kick-in.

At the instigation of Sepp "51 bad ideas a day" Blatter, this expedient in fact was tried a few years ago in an international youth tournament – a novelty which was reduced to farce by the Chinese, who possessed a huge young man who took every kick-in, wherever the ball went out of play and no matter how far away from it he was at the time, thereby provoking one hiatus after another.

ARSENAL duly prevailed at Upton Park in the FA Cup against a tiring West Ham United, who had given it their all and even taken the lead – courtesy of a shocking aberration in the Arsenal defence.

When Wenger, who had begun with a clutch of very young men, finally brought on Samir Nasri and Abou Diaby, the music emphatically changed. Aaron Ramsey, that precocious star of the 2008 FA Cup Final with Cardiff City, swept in a fine left-footed equaliser, while Eduardo, not generally noted for his aerial prowess, soared to a left-wing cross to head the winning, second goal.

Previously it had looked, not for the first time, that the Arsenal attack, devoid of Robin Van Persie, lacked both height and bulk. Previously, against Aston Villa, the Gunners had been beating at what seemed a solid Villa defence. It took the resplendent arrival of Cesc Fabregas, though hardly fit to play, to galvanise the attack and turn that game. In his absence, Ramsey has been able to shine; not least, West Ham apart, at Olympiakos in the Champions League.

Elegant in style, he largely resembles Fabregas. He himself insists that he is quite capable of playing a holding role, but this, I submit, would be a waste of his talents.

An embarrassment of riches, you might say.

BY the time you read this, Portsmouth may well be in administration, with its concomitant points problem.

Or, given their colossal £60million debt, in worse plight still. With their patience evidently exhausted, the Inland Revenue threatened to wind the club up – and that was for a mere £3.5m. Lens have pursued them, exasperated, for payment for two players: Aruna Dindane and Nadir Belhadj. Their previous owner, Alexandre Gaydamak, says he is owed £28m. And all too few clubs seem interested in buying those players Pompey have left after the fire sales of last summer.

Supposed Arab benefactors have been unable to save them. Indeed, the first of them, Sulaiman Al Fahim, was dismally incapable of putting his money where his mouth was, while successor Ali Al Faraj had desperately to borrow to raise funds.

Pompey haven't exactly helped themselves in terms of image by taking on, as an unofficial administrator, a lawyer who is reported to have been banned for years in his native Israel for serious malfeasance. And yet they won the FA Cup as recently as 2008. How sad it would be to see them disappear.

IN a somewhat gratuitous public statement, Carlo Ancelotti, the Chelsea manager, encouraged his goalkeeper, Petr Cech, to come off his line and dominate his area. The implication being, as if we didn't know, that he has not been doing it, thus rendering Chelsea vulnerable at set-pieces.

Quite apart from the fact that Cech was traumatically kicked on the head at Reading, however inadvertently, by left-winger Stephen Hunt, and took months to recover physically – and who knows how well, psychologically? – there is another school of thought about "the Trouble with Chelsea" which insists that Cech's real problem is the current tendency of defender

Rising to the challenge...Cech

John Terry to drop ever deeper and thus cramp his style. The implication being that Terry is aware of his possibly diminishing pace.

RAFA BENITEZ'S dubious transfer deals – the sale of Xabi Alonso to Real Madrid, the absurd, brief acquisition of Robbie Keane, the gamble of Alberto Aquilani – may also embrace Sami Hyypia's move to Bayer Leverkusen. A veteran centre-half he may be, but he is having a fine season and is in no small measure responsible for their leading the Bundesliga at the winter break. ●

GOALS
WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN...

Keeper turned poacher...Bolat heads the winner

1 Salva Sevilla, Salamanca v Albacete
A Left-foot strike, with venomous dip, that beats the goalkeeper all ends up

2 Sinan Bolat, Standard Liege v AZ Alkmaar
A superb header into the top corner from the Standard keeper

3 Massimo Maccarone, Siena v Udinese
Two step-overs are followed by a curling shot into the far top corner

4 Giuseppe Cozzolino, Como v Lecco
Cushions the ball on his chest and then turns to volley home from 25 yards

5 Javier Pastore, Argentina v Catalonia
Some intricate passing before he tees up and volleys home from 20 yards

AND ONE TO FORGET...

Constant pain...Djakpa (right) during Hannover's own-goal glut

Constant Djakpa, Hannover v Borussia Monchengladbach
As Hannover gifted three own goals to Borussia, this is the pick of the bunch as the defender beats his keeper from 25 yards

To see clips of these goals, visit www.worldsoccer.com

NUMBERS GAME

£92.6m
Manchester City's losses in the 12 months since they were bought by Sheikh Mansour

£340m
Chelsea debt that has now been wiped out by their owner, Roman Abramovich

€826,222
bonuses paid to France coach Raymond Domenech following qualification for the World Cup finals in South Africa

77
per cent of total World Cup ticket applications from South Africans in the third phase of sales

22,942
World Cup ticket applications that have been received from the USA – the highest total from any single country, after South Africa, in the third phase of ticket sales

£80,000
The reported weekly wage of John Utaka at financially-troubled Premier League club Portsmouth

13
points separating French champions Bordeaux from struggling former top dogs Lyon at the halfway stage of the season

REPORTS we couldn't make up

CORITIBA MUST PAY THE PRICE

Brazilian side Coritiba will have to get used to playing in an alien environment next season, having been ordered to play no fewer than 30 home games on a neutral ground as punishment for the behaviour of their fans after the 1-1 draw with Fluminense which sealed the Parana state club's relegation to the second tier.

The scenes of mayhem, with Coritiba supporters attacking the referee, opposition players and police, also resulted in a £200,000 fine.

Bad losers...violence followed Coritiba's relegation

MAINZ OVER MATTER

Local Bundesliga rivals Mainz and Eintracht Frankfurt have not stopped exchanging verbal volleys this term, with the acrimonious tone being set by the former's general manager Christian Heidel and Frankfurt coach Michael Skibbe.

However, thanks to the efforts of Mainz president Harald Strutz and Frankfurter executive chairman Heribert Bruchhagen all is now sweetness and light, and to cement their new-found entente the pair have turned to rocking out. Fifty-eight-year-old Strutz plays in a band, The Stags, and at a recent gig hauled Bruchhagen on stage for a duet of the Rolling Stones' *Satisfaction*.

New goal in life...Xavier

ABEL CALLS IT A DAY

Former Portugal international Abel Xavier has announced his retirement from football at the age of 37.

The former Liverpool, Everton and Middlesbrough defender said that he will dedicate the rest of his life to humanitarian causes after he converted to Islam.

He now wishes to be known as Faisal Xavier.

RUMOURS we'd like to believe

Premier target...Gignac

- The Gallic airwaves are crackling with rumours that Toulouse's France international striker Andre-Pierre Gignac is about to move on – destination Liverpool or Arsenal.

- According to *L'Equipe*, Marseille are making a pitch to Internazionale for winger Mancini, who has never managed to convince *Nerazzurri* coach Jose Mourinho that he was worth persisting with.

- Sources in the south of Italy insist that Napoli have made Egypt and Zamalek playmaker Shikabala their top transfer target of the moment.

- Liverpool's Spanish wide man Albert Riera could soon be on the move to Olympiakos, say the Greek media. Rafa Benitez needs the cash and would drive him to Piraeus himself for the right price.

- In the Bundesliga, a swap deal is taking shape involving Schalke's Brazilian right-back Rafinha and Marcel Schafer, the current left-back of reigning champions Wolfsburg as well as the *Nationalmannschaft*.

Trading places...Schafer

Paul Gardner

Play your cards right?

I HAVE another collection of these damn statistics in front of me. From Stats Inc, who are very good at this sort of thing, these particular figures have made me feel pretty pleased with myself because they confirm a particular opinion of mine: that English referees are much too lenient in dealing with violent play.

At least, that's what they appear to do. That's the problem with stats though, they're sneaky. You're never quite sure if they are on your side or not.

What we have is an average number of cards given out by referees in top European league matches:

	Yellow cards	Red cards
Spain	5.04	0.37
Italy	4.24	0.31
Germany	3.85	0.20
France	3.60	0.22
England	3.05	0.17

There you have it. Simplifying the figures a little, in England it's one red card every six games, whereas in Spain and Italy it's one every three games. As for yellow cards, there's only three per game in England, as against four in Italy and five in Spain.

In both categories, the Premier League comes off as the least severe of the five leagues surveyed – which proves my theory of English leniency. Case closed. Except that it doesn't prove anything at all...

Those same figures could be interpreted as meaning that the English league is the cleanest in Europe and, therefore, there is no need for the referees to distribute cards.

Unless we know what each of those bookable offences was for, we cannot use these statistics to prove anything. In English football circles there is certainly a view that Italian referees are far too quick with their cards – which can be countered by alleging that English referees are too reluctant to dole out theirs.

Proof, then, there is not. But the stats do bolster other evidence. We have had heard from foreign players who have gone to play in England and expressed their astonishment at what the referees allow.

Frank Leboeuf: "I think English referees need to be more aware of some of the dangerous challenges that happen."

Robert Pires: "Players use their elbows a lot and pull jerseys knowing that the referees will let it go."

Fernando Torres: "The referees only give you a foul once you are bleeding."

Carlos Tevez: "You don't see much dribbling here, you only get one touch otherwise [defenders] eat your legs."

So, in the end, it no doubt comes down to one's personal impressions and, admittedly, I am looking for those stats to support my view that Premier League referees are way too kind to the thugs – two or three times more lenient, by the mathematics involved.

Anyway, whatever one may or may not want to read into the figures, one thing stands out: English refereeing is very different from that seen in Spain and Italy, and – to a lesser extent – in France and Germany.

"Statistics show that English refs are lenient compared to their continental counterparts"

Further evidence that the essence of that difference is an easygoing approach to violent tackling is not lacking. I would cite one area that – it seems to me – is much more noticeable in England than in other countries: this habit of delivering friendly little lectures instead of giving cards.

An archetypal case in point came during a recent Portsmouth-Arsenal game, in which Pompey midfielder Richard Hughes was, deservedly, booked by referee Alan Wiley in the 85th minute. Four minutes later, Hughes scythed violently into Carlos Vela's legs, far too late to make any contact with the ball, and sent the Mexican sprawling. An obvious yellow card foul, twice over, as, firstly, it was a patently reckless, even dangerous challenge, and, secondly, because Vela was breaking clear in midfield. Hughes' tackle was unsporting behaviour: "a foul for the tactical purpose of interfering with or breaking up a promising attack".

Wiley...more action, less words

Referee Wiley awarded Arsenal the free-kick but did not give the card. He did feel it necessary to say a few words to Hughes, though. Wiley's benevolent approach was applauded by the English TV commentators who found it "encouraging" that Wiley had used "common sense" by not ejecting Hughes. All this while Vela was sitting on the ground ruefully checking that his ankles were still intact. One of the commentators even came close to imputing some sort of blame to Vela because he had been "a little too quick" for Hughes.

Returning to the stats, I feel certain that in Spain, Italy, Germany and France a second yellow would have been given – and hence the red – as the rules command. Obviously, it doesn't take many of these decisions, where a few friendly words replace a mandatory yellow, to skew the stats.

I find no basis in the rule book for the verbal caution. What is it that these referees say? What could Wiley possibly be saying to Hughes, other than to admit that he's not going to do what he is supposed to do and apply the rules? Frankly, I'd love to hear that short speech. Mind you, more than likely we will hear these referee lectures soon, after some clever techno-geek has found a way to tap into them – though I doubt they will contain anything the referees will feel proud to have aired.

On the whole, I do like the notion that referees should be allowed a certain amount of flexibility in their decisions. But not when it comes to violent fouls. ●

David Conn

Over the odds

Portsmouth's demise is linked directly to overspending by Chelsea and Manchester City

IT ALMOST WORKS as a neat image to point out that Premier League clubs wearing red – Manchester United and Liverpool – entered 2010 with serious debts, while those in blue – Chelsea and Manchester City – had their loans paid off by indulgent billionaires. That, though, leaves out the deep blues of Portsmouth, who limp on in a financial state more parlous than any Premier League club since Leeds United's 2003 implosion.

The Premier League, led by its chief executive, Richard Scudamore, remains wedded to the dogma that its football clubs are not clubs but commercial companies with shares available for purchase by anybody. Scudamore presents this as a virtue, pointing to the huge investment which some buyers, most notably Roman Abramovich at Chelsea and Sheikh Mansour at City, have introduced.

Only a tiny fraction of that money has gone anywhere other than in increased wages for players: Chelsea reportedly breaking the £7.5million-a-year barrier for John Terry, City delivering £8m per annum to Robinho – who has been more sulky than silky during his stopover in rainy Manchester.

The free marketeers nevertheless argue that the owners' investments have trickled down, delivering cash to clubs which have sold players to these two, a long chain which can be traced down the leagues. Yet that overlooks the fact that the excessive spending has inflated all transfer fees, and all wages, for all players, trickling right through the Premier League, Football League and even into semi-professional football. The sport is an intimately connected pyramid in which tiny slivers of superiority between exceptionally talented players are rewarded in millions.

Chelsea and City posted losses of £44m and £92m respectively for 2008-09 due to spending vastly more in players' transfer fees and wages than they could afford without the financial backing of their owners.

Overspending on that dizzying scale is possible because their owners – both oil magnates, of dizzyingly different backgrounds – are prepared, for their own reasons, to pay for them. Yet there is a direct connection between the good times City fans are now expecting and the cracking up of Pompey. There, Harry Redknapp's FA Cup win, as recent as May 2008, was attained with players such as Sol Campbell, Glen Johnson, Sylvain Distin, Niko Kranjcar, Pedro Mendes and Lassana Diarra – all now departed.

The club could not afford them without the financial support of owner Alexandre Gaydamak, which he withdrew after Wembley. Now Pompey hover around the knacker's yard, struggling to pay the players who remain, while staring at insolvency which relegation to the Championship would surely precipitate.

Both Abramovich and Mansour have converted their loans to their clubs into shares – a permanent form of investment which looks far better than providing it as debt. Both clubs have committed not to overspend forever, though Chelsea's former chief executive, Peter Kenyon, was forced to revise his deadline of this year for Chelsea to break even, partly due to Abramovich's habit of firing managers and coaching staff with handsome compensation packages.

City have pledged to become "sustainable", with Graham Wallace, their chief financial and administration officer, saying the 2008-09 loss represents City "in investment mode". Certainly, the club cannot be expected to sign players with quite the frenzy they did in Mansour's first year, but Wallace would still not define what they mean by "sustainable", nor would he put a date on it.

Cup winner...Campbell

The Premier League's relaxed, free-market attitude to the random nature of English football's club car boot sale means that no owner has anything to fear as long as they can maintain the club in whatever financial state they are running it. But for Chelsea and City there is an emerging threat to the owners' subsidies – or welcome discipline, depending on your point of view.

Michel Platini has wrestled since he became UEFA's president with his gut feeling that overspending is unsustainable and bad for football, and he has felt his way into deciding what to do about it. Last August, UEFA came up with "financial fair play", approved by all its associations and affiliated club bodies, which means that, from 2013-14, clubs competing in UEFA competitions will have to be at break even and not reliant on funding from outside.

The details are being worked out at headache-inducing sessions in functional office rooms all over Europe, but the rule – in some form – is heading for the statute book. It is intended to mean that City and Chelsea will not be able to compete in the Champions League if Mansour and Abramovich are still needed to pay the wages.

Portsmouth, though, are unlikely to be affected. They will surely be a long, long way from European competition when any such rule does come into force. ●

"Football is an intimately connected pyramid in which tiny slivers of superiority between talented players are rewarded in millions"

HEROES...

GUY CHAMBILY

The only member of the French Football Federation board who was prepared to stand up and call for the head of the increasingly discredited and unpopular national coach, Raymond Domenech.

No1 penalty taker...Butt

HUMBERTO SUAZO

Star turn of the Mexican opening championship Final, scoring three times in Monterrey's two-legged victory over Cruz Azul.

HANS-JORG BUTT

Bayern Munich's keeper scored against Juventus with a penalty. It was the third time he has scored against the Italian side.

JAVIER SAVIOLA

Off-colour for so long, the Argentinian has returned to life at Benfica, scoring the winner in the recent *clasico* with Porto.

Winning treble...Suazo

& VILLAINS

Caught short...Lehmann

JENS LEHMANN

The Stuttgart goalkeeper was spotted peeing on advertising hoardings by television cameras during a break in the 3–1 Champions League win over Unirea Urziceni.

FENERBAHCE PLAYERS

The likes of Fabio Bilica, Gokcek Vederson, Andre Santos and Colin Kazim-Richards of the Turkish club are alleged to have taken part in organised orgies in various hotels in Istanbul.

GARRY COOK

The Manchester City chief executive cut a rather underhand and easily-rattled figure when he attempted to justify the club's sacking of manager Mark Hughes.

FEYENOORD'S BOARD

After running up debts of around £32million, the former Champions Cup and UEFA Cup winners will have to hold a fire sale of players to raise much-needed funds.

WESLEY SNEIJDER

Still unhappy with the way he was dumped by Real Madrid last summer, the Internazionale midfielder overstepped the mark when he dubbed Galacticos president Florentino Perez and sports director Jorge Valdano "mafiosi".

Snide comment...Sneijder

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HEADLINERS

People in the news...on and off the pitch

Pedro

Barcelona's record-breaking youngster tipped for World Cup call-up

SPAIN

IN THE BUILD-UP to the Club World Cup, Barcelona's Pedro Rodriguez Ledesma asked his team-mates to let him take a penalty if there was one. But only if they were winning easily. And only if they really, really didn't mind.

The reason was simple: he was a goal away from a unique record.

In a single season, the 22-year-old striker from the Canary Islands – recently renamed Pedro having previously been known as Pedrito ("little Pedro") – had scored in every single competition in which Barca had played.

In barely four months he'd scored against Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish Supercup and against Shakhtar Donetsk in the European Supercup. He'd scored in the league against Almeria, in the Spanish Cup against Cultural Leonesa and in the Champions League against Dynamo Kyiv. Now he was one goal away from adding a sixth tournament to that list – something nobody had ever done before.

Pedro did score – and not just once, but twice. He got Barcelona's third in the semi-final against Atlante and then, with the clock ticking down in the Final, he equalised against Estudiantes to send the game into extra time.

After the semi-final, Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola had insisted: "I'm not especially happy for him." Now, with his side's astonishing season having been given the perfect finale, he was.

But if it sounds like Guardiola's support for Pedro is lukewarm, think again. In the summer of 2007, the young striker's days at the club were numbered. He arrived in August 2004, just two days after his 16th birthday, but the reports put together by the technical staff suggested that it was best to release him. Even now, Pedro admits he is not sure that he will continue at the club. "I want to," he says. "But the best players always come here."

In 2007, he was even less sure, but that was when Guardiola arrived as Barcelona B's coach. Thirty seven games followed as Barcelona's reserve side won promotion.

In 2008-09 Pedro had scored 10 in 17 when Guardiola, now in charge of the first team, chose to give him his big break. His promotion, like that of Sergio Busquets, was symbolic of Barcelona's approach – especially under Guardiola. "I wouldn't have got a place in the first team if I had been at Madrid," Pedro says. "They don't back the youth team like we do."

Barcelona had patience too. And though Pedro did not score, he impressed with his speed, his willingness to run at people, his two-footedness and the intelligence of his movement. This season, the goals have come – and how.

It is not just that Pedro has scored in every competition, he has scored 13 times in all competitions – which is more than Zlatan Ibrahimovic. And he's still not a guaranteed starter – which means he is averaging a goal every 111 minutes, a better record even than Leo Messi.

Even when he is not playing well, Pedro has an ability to anticipate where the ball will drop, dashing in on diagonal runs from the right side. Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque is even contemplating calling him up for the World Cup.

"Victor Valdes says I have got a flower I don't know where," smiles Pedro, as having flora protruding from your rear-end is a Spanish way of saying he's lucky. But Guardiola insists that it's not luck at all. In fact, he says, Pedro can still improve. He reckons that for all the goals, the attacker needs to believe in himself even more. A player this good doesn't need to politely ask his team-mates for a penalty when he can save them with a dramatic 88th-minute header.

"He has to let himself go a bit," says the coach. "He still doesn't believe he's in the Barcelona first team. But he should: Pedro can achieve so much."

Sid Lowe

World beater...Pedro celebrates his goal against Estudiantes

Real opportunity...the Munich club may be forced to cash in on Ribery this summer

Franck Ribery
French winger heading for Bayern exit

GERMANY

FRANCK RIBERY has not kicked a ball in anger for Bayern Munich since early October but, true to the spirit which has always pervaded "FC Hollywood", the 26-year-old Frenchman still continued to dominate the Bundesliga limelight during the winter break as he stumbled from a knee injury to a toe problem.

Ribery made an explosive start in the German game after arriving from Marseille in 2007. He was player of the season after his first term, but a sudden disaffection for life in Munich manifest itself in the middle of the last campaign when he understood that Bayern did not rank among potential winners of the Champions League.

Injury problems during the summer confused discussions over his future but, despite Bayern denials, it was clear Real Madrid had claimed an advantage. This was partly due to the fact that Ribery shared the same agent, Alain Migliaccio, as Zinedine Zidane – who had just returned to Madrid as an adviser to the returning president, Florentino Perez.

Reports from Germany claim Bayern and Madrid have agreed a £55million deal to be completed this summer after the World Cup finals when, it is hoped, Ribery will have re-established full fitness. Madrid's informal option on his purchase was apparently agreed when the Spanish giants sold Holland winger Arjen Robben to the Germans last August.

Ribery will be out of contract in Munich at the end of next season – and as he seems so determined to move to Spain – Bayern need to sell him within the next six months to recoup any significant money.

Ribery has recently been quoted as saying: "I very much want to win the Champions League. We have a team good enough to win the German league and Cup, but not the Champions League. Realistically, only four clubs can win it: Manchester United, Chelsea, Barcelona and Real Madrid. Right now we can't compete."

Meanwhile, Uli Hoeness, who rose from general manager to president after Franz Beckenbauer retired, has sought to rein back speculation about a Madrid deal, claiming: "There is no agreement between us and Real Madrid. No offer, no option, no talks. The first option is that Ribery should extend his contract which expires in the summer of 2011. Only if there is no possibility of that will we enter into conversations with someone else."

However, Migliaccio has insisted the France forward has no intention of staying in Bavaria, saying: "Either he goes at the end of his contract or he goes this coming summer. Those are the only possibilities."

Any hope Bayern and Hoeness may hold over persuading Ribery to stay appeared to fly out of the window when new sports director Christian Nerlinger declared that pay cuts were on the way.

The former Germany midfielder declared: "Football clubs are not exempt from the pressures of the general financial situation, not even FC Bayern.

"We have to be realistic – and so do our players. Any other road is the road to chaos."

Keir Radnedge

Adriano
"Emperor" celebrates leading role in Flamengo title success

BRAZIL

Hail the champions...Adriano acknowledges the Flamengo fans after winning the Brazilian title

IN HIS FIRST GAME after rejoining Flamengo, Adriano's mere presence put an extra 50,000 on the gate. "The emperor has returned," they chanted – and the 27-year-old striker was looking imperious from day one. His 19 goals – which made him the competition's joint-top scorer – and his all-round attacking play were vital to the Rio de Janeiro club ending a 17-year wait to win the Brazilian Championship.

All this represented a remarkable comeback just a few months after mental health problems forced Adriano to quit Italian football and even muse about retiring from the game.

In truth, his success on the field does not necessarily mean that all his problems have been solved; he has confessed to a problem with alcohol. During the campaign he missed the occasional training session and, bizarrely, was absent from the crucial penultimate round when he turned up with an injured foot. The official line was that he had stepped on a light bulb. Few believed it – and plenty of alternative explanations circulated in Rio. His good fortune was that Flamengo won without him, while chief rivals Sao Paulo lost, and a possible title win suddenly became probable.

Flamengo could afford to treat his lapses with tolerance because, when he was on the field, Adriano won matches. At times he looked like an adult who had wandered into a kids' game. From day one it was apparent that any decent cross from the byline would give him an excellent scoring chance – and right-back Leonardo Moura was a consistent provider.

In the closing months of the championship, Adriano forged a wonderful relationship with veteran Serb playmaker Dejan Petkovic, his main supply line through the middle of the field. Petkovic gave Adriano the chance to show he is much more than a big, hulking striker, and that his movement can be intelligent, while his left foot is capable of surprising subtlety as well as fearsome power. Theirs was the link-up that won the title.

The speed of his recovery meant that Adriano was only out of the Brazil squad for a brief interlude and he began 2010 as Luis Fabiano's reserve. As well as the World Cup, the year also gives him the chance to represent Flamengo in the Libertadores Cup. But will he take it?

There is much speculation about his future, with transfer offers likely to come in from Italy and England. However, it is worth remembering his battle against depression in Italy is very recent and if he returns to Europe his employers must be aware that inside Adriano's giant frame beats the heart of a vulnerable child. Whether he stays or goes, the "emperor" will need to be handled with care.

Tim Vickery

Dan Petrescu
Rising star quits Unirea ahead of Liverpool clash

ROMANIA

AFTER LEADING Unirea Urziceni to the Romanian league title last term, and then the last 32 of this season's Europa League, the stock of coach Dan Petrescu is rising fast.

But, in a major surprise, the former Chelsea defender quit the Romanian champions to join Russian second division side Kuban Krasnodar.

Sources close to Unirea said that Petrescu was angry after the club owner, Dumitru Bucsaru, failed to make money available for new transfers ahead of the games against Liverpool in the Europa League. Bucsaru also released key players Tiberiu Balan and Dacian Varga, so Petrescu feared a disaster against the English club.

Radu Timofte

Surprise...despite success at Unirea, Petrescu has abruptly departed

Great escape...Pandev (right) makes a fresh start with Inter

Goran Pandev
Lazio refusenik joins Inter

ITALY

WITH SAMUEL ETO'O called up for African Nations Cup duty by Cameroon, Italian champions Internazionale added another weapon to their armoury with the signing of Lazio's talented Macedonian, Goran Pandev.

Pandev's time at Lazio ended in the most acrimonious manner possible, given that the player had been labelled a "rebel" by club president Claudio Lotito after handing in a transfer request last summer.

From that point on, Pandev was not only out of the Lazio team but he was also banned by the club from training with the first-team squad.

Called on to resolve the dispute, the Football League's Collegio Arbitrale – a sort of Labour Court – ruled in favour of Pandev two days before Christmas, ordering Lazio to not only release the player but to also pay him £140,000 in damages.

Needless to say, the story does not end there, for even as Inter team director Lele Oriali was showing a delighted Pandev around his new dressing room, Lotito was announcing his intention of contesting the Football League's ruling in the state judiciary.

Also moving in the January transfer window was Italy striker Luca Toni, who finally exited Bayern Munich, where he had fallen out spectacularly with coach Louis Van Gaal. The former Fiorentina striker joined Roma on loan for the rest of the season.

Paddy Agnew

● For a full list of transfers, see worldsoccer.com/transfers

Keir Radnedge

The phoney war is over

The World Cup bidding process for 2018 and 2022 is about to get serious

WORLD CUP bids attract an intriguing mixture of motives. After a bidding decade which had been stage-managed to send the World Cup to South Africa in 2010 (it should have been 2006 but someone lost the plot!) and Brazil in 2014, the game had almost forgotten how much fun the process can be.

However, make the most of the campaign for 2018 and 2022 as who knows where we will all be when it comes around again because the next World Cup for which FIFA – if the federation still exists in recognisable form – will invite bids is that of 2026.

By then, the Champions League may have taken over the world, Michel Platini might be World Football Emperor and Wayne Rooney could be chairman of the Football Association.

The clue to the truth that bidding is not only about wanting to stage some football matches is revealed in the current process by the presence of Indonesia in the lists. How many people are aware that Indonesia is the world's fourth-largest country in terms of population (around 230 million)? That would appear to give it some clout in bidding terms – until it is partnered with the fact that all those people are spread over more than 17,000 islands.

Nugraha Besoes, general secretary of Indonesia's FA, insists that 11 major cities are ready to play host and seven new stadia are in the planning stage. He also points out, very readily, that Indonesia has a competitive World Cup pedigree. Well, they did play in the finals once, as Dutch East Indies, in France in 1938.

Besoes adds: "We are very serious about having the World Cup here. We are waiting for the government to make a decision whether it will back the bid. This involves so many ministries and a lot of deep, internal discussions before we can get the guarantees we want, but we are optimistic they'll get behind it."

That is novel in itself. Football federations usually go to governments first before jumping into the bid process. The guarantees demanded by FIFA over infrastructure, security, tax, finance and entry permits are issues on which only a government can rule.

By undertaking the process in reverse order, the Indonesians have already scored one own goal. The other own goal is the promotional video which is being issued. It's a wonderful, colourful, scenic piece of tourism advertising – which suggests this is the point, rather than a serious expectation of winning the rights to welcome the football world in 2022, the Indonesians having now focused on the more distant goal after starting in pursuit of both 2018 and 2022.

The other runners and riders are worth more serious consideration, of course: Australia, England, Japan, Holland/Belgium, Russia, Spain/Portugal, United States, Qatar and South Korea – with FIFA's executive ruling on both World Cups on December 2.

Now that there is less than a year to voting, the phoney war is over. Bid books must be submitted in mid-May and then come the inspection tours. This was the timeline which guided England's choice of mid-December 2009 to pick its 17 stadia from 12 proposed host cities and towns.

> **Watch out for the Russians. They care seriously about their bid**

Whole new ball game...could London's Olympic Stadium see World Cup action?

Top of the pile is London, with three stadia proposed and four named. Definitive choices are Wembley and Arsenal, with an alternative offered between the proposed new Tottenham Hotspur stadium and the 2012 Olympic Stadium. The only other city with more than one venue proposed is Manchester, represented by Old Trafford and the City of Manchester stadium at Eastlands.

The full list of cities and stadia chosen is: Birmingham (Villa Park), Bristol (new Ashton Vale), Leeds (Elland Road), Liverpool (Anfield or new Anfield), London (Emirates Stadium, new White Hart Lane or Olympic Stadium, Wembley), Manchester (City of Manchester, Old Trafford), Milton Keynes (Stadium MK), Newcastle/Gateshead (St James' Park), Nottingham (new City Ground), Plymouth (Home Park), Sheffield (Hillsborough) and Sunderland (Stadium of Light).

That choice was bad news for Derby, Hull and Leicester, who will not return to consideration even if there are any doubts or difficulties over selected venues. For them the World Cup dream has come and gone.

The venues chosen represent a wide geographical reach. However, inclusion in the England list is no guarantee of final selection. If England

wins the bid vote within the FIFA executive in December, the world federation will trim the shortlist again.

South Africa, for example, will host the World Cup finals this summer in 10 stadia in nine cities. On that basis, a number of England's named stadia must be considered now in competition. These obviously include Newcastle and Sunderland in the north east, Leeds and Sheffield in Yorkshire, and Plymouth and Bristol in the south west.

Wembley Final

Inevitably, Wembley would stage the opening match and also the Final, as well as group and knockout-stage matches in between. In 1966, Wembley staged nine matches. The only other London stadium involved was the now-demolished White City, which staged a single group match.

Other London stadia then, including Arsenal's old Highbury, Chelsea's Stamford Bridge and Tottenham's White Hart Lane, had pitches which were too small for international use.

The most intriguing inclusion in the list is the recently built Milton Keynes stadium which was constructed, amid controversy, to host matches by the transplanted former Wimbledon club. The stadium, now with a 22,000 capacity, was designed with possible expansion in mind.

At least, after all the internal wrangling, some more money is in place. Prime minister Gordon Brown has pledged that England's bid will be backed by a £2.5million government loan. That is not what bid chairman David Triesman originally expected – there had been initial talk of a £5m grant – but something is better than nothing in these recessionary times.

All the bids have issues. Spain must decide whether to dump Portugal and the joint Holland/Belgium bid may yet make one last effort to step up credibility by bringing Johan Cruyff on board in some sort of ambassadorial role. Australia's bid still seems to rely too much on Frank Lowy's millions, while the United States has to resolve an awkward little domestic distraction over a "second division civil war" and Qatar faces a major political challenge in persuading the game to go to the Middle East.

Watch out, then, for the Russians. They care seriously about their bid. Viewers of the promotional video are left in no doubt about the fact. Players speaking up on film, including Arsenal's Andrei Arshavin, barely betray even the hint of a smile.

This is not fun; this is serious stuff. But then, the Russians have several challenges to meet.

The big one is the matter of persuading FIFA that the size of the country is no obstacle; another, though no one would dare admit to it publicly, is the need to distance Russia's capabilities from the chaos surrounding the Euro 2012 co-hosting of neighbours Ukraine and Poland.

Here, at least, FIFA can look on benignly. That, of course, is UEFA's problem...of which European fans have not heard the last. ●

Firing line...Domenech keeps his critics at bay

The case against Domenech

RAYMOND DOMENECH, it appears, is not yet out of the wood. France's World Cup coach remains a focus for attack even though *Les Bleus* are safely through to the finals again and will be a class attraction in South Africa.

If France had failed in their qualifying group – they finished a late-running second – or lost to the Republic of Ireland in the play-offs then Domenech would now be out of work. However, so controversial is he that attempts to force him out continue. One effort to have a vote on his future was staged before Christmas at the last 2009 meeting of the French federation's executive committee. The one-man rebellion staged by Guy Chambily was swiftly quelled.

Now, however, the "Domenech Out" movement is trying another, more subtle, tactic. Moves are afoot to "support" Domenech with a two-man team made up of Lens president Gervais Martel and national coaching director Gerard Houllier, who is himself a former coach of the national side.

Both men have professed themselves "astonished" at the idea, but sports minister Rama Yade and French league president Frederic Thiriez have made no secret of their own wishes to see the national team surrounded by a more positive aura.

Thiriez says: "It's not a matter of personalities. This is all about giving the French national team the best possible platform so it can be as successful as is possible at the World Cup finals. This is a chance which comes only once every four years – if then."

Domenech's tactics, team selections and communication style has irritated more and more officials and players.

But critics hope that ordering him to accept "support" would be such a blow to his pride that he would do their job for them and resign. Bordeaux's Laurent Blanc would then be everyone's favourite to take over on a part-time basis for the finals.

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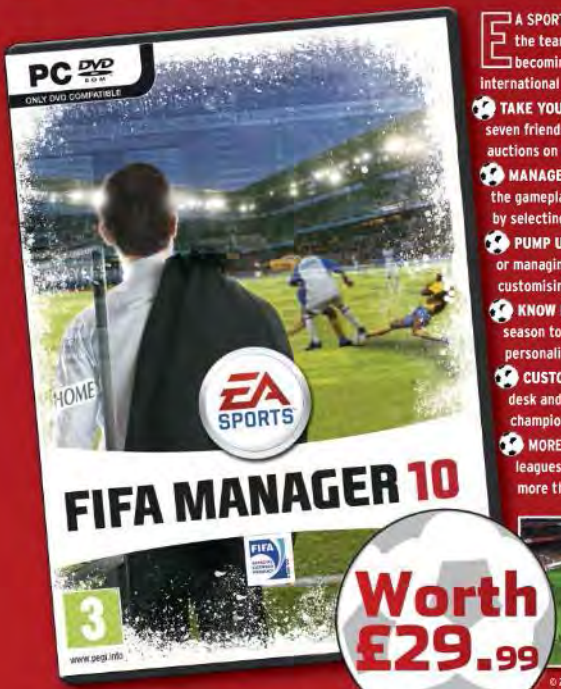

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Almost there

As it readies itself for this summer's World Cup finals, South Africa still has a couple of problems that need addressing

SOUTH AFRICA

KEIR RADNEDGE in Durban

THE STADIA may be there or thereabouts and the police are confident about security. However, it is transport and accommodation that remain the great unknowns ahead of this summer's World Cup in South Africa.

Fans who are able to travel and find places to stay between June 11 and July 11 will enjoy some of the venues: the steel and concrete giraffes which hold up the stadium in Nelspruit, the enveloping calabash at Soccer City and, above all, the magnificent Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban.

But how fans will get from one to another is open to question.

Johannesburg's ORTIA (Oliver R Tambo International Airport) has a flash new terminal – not before time – and completion of the opening of a new airport in Durban is scheduled, at the 11th hour, for May, but many of the airports continue to look inadequate. Meanwhile, fares will increase three or four times in price between May and the start of the tournament in June, and there are no motorways or inter-city trains as Europeans and Americans would understand them.

Around the time of the draw in Cape Town, a string of government ministers expressed their full confidence in meeting concerns over accommodation and transport.

But if Transport Plan A goes wrong, there is no Plan B.

I found that out, trying to fly from Port Elizabeth to Durban. When bad

weather postponed take-off there was no realistic alternative means of making the journey. While that hardly mattered for me, it would matter a great deal for fans attempting to reach a match.

Last June, following the Confederations Cup, FIFA warned that accommodation remained an unresolved problem for the World Cup organisers in South Africa.

The fact that two fan-filled cruise liners will be busily patrolling the southern coast between Durban, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town in June and July hardly sounds like a ring of confidence in terms of hotel accommodation for fans – though local tourism officials insist this is a private enterprise initiative and is unrelated from the official Nelson Mandela Bay accommodation project.

Andrew Jordaan of Match, FIFA's official ticket and accommodation bureau, is confident about hotel capacity for all matches in Port Elizabeth/Nelson Mandela Bay. This includes the Slovenia v England group game which offers the prospect of a shock overnight influx of up to 30,000 England supporters.

"Our accommodation plans are still on track," said Jordaan, who is the brother of organising chief Danny Jordaan. "I'm confident there will be enough accommodation in the system. In fact, by the end of January, I think we will even find we have a surplus."

> **"If transport Plan A goes wrong, there is no Plan B"**

Hardly convenient

Such optimistic projections, however, are based on a zone of 100 miles from the stadium in Port Elizabeth – which is hardly convenient given the local transport challenges.

Also, Andrew Jordaan's knowledge of World Cup fan behaviour appeared intriguingly off track when he said: "People will travel from the rest of the world to watch a game only on the basis that they have got a ticket and that they have accommodation."

He may have a surprise in store. English, Dutch and German fans are noted for being inspired by the challenge of getting to – and into – matches for which they have no advance tickets. None of South Africa's stated tourism or transport "solutions" appear to take such a reality into account.

The fact that transport and accommodation are now the main focus of critical concern has been welcomed by the security services as proof of increasing international confidence in World Cup safety issues.

Police senior superintendent Vish Naidoo has spent much of the last five years telling anyone who would listen that South Africa has staged a host of incident-free major sports events and that there is no reason for the World Cup to be any different.

He repeated: "At first, all the questions and all the talk was about security. Now the questions and concerns are all about travel and accommodation. That shows people have started to get our message.

"We have delivered more than 150 international events, including the rugby World Cup and cricket World Cup, and various major conferences. These all paved the way for the World Cup, which is truly the biggest event of them all."

Naidoo has all the figures at his fingertips:

- Around 450,000 football tourists are expected to fly in for the finals.
- The South African police service has been strengthened by the recruitment and training of an

Rocky road...the armies of fans travelling between World Cup venues could be in for a difficult journey

additional 55,000 officers.

- Some £64million has been spent on state-of-the-art security equipment, including six helicopters to take the security services' strength in numbers up to 42.
- Roughly 100 BMW cars have been brought in for extra security on the long, wild empty roads of the Republic.
- Ten new water canons have been purchased for crowd control if necessary.

Naidoo claimed that the first Fan Fest rehearsal – in Cape Town's Long Street during the finals draw – was a success. However, police had underestimated the popularity and many local fans had to be turned away amid some chaos and confusion.

"At least no incidents were reported," remarked Naidoo.

But, in fact, there were two unrelated incidents earlier on the day of the draw, both bomb hoaxes. One froze the Cape Town airport for an hour and another emptied the media centre for a similar period. Two men were arrested.

The greater truth is that South Africa is involved in a race against time in the cause of high-speed, short-term self-promotion.

> **"The truth is that South Africa is involved in a race against time"**

On track...the stadiums are looking good but doubts remain about transport links

Element number one involves proclaiming its pride in the democratic progress achieved since Nelson Mandela walked out of Victor Verster prison in 1990.

Equally important, however, is the one-off opportunity to build modern infrastructure as the football provides an event on which politicians can capitalise – without criticism – in a sports-mad country, while expanding the country's tourism reach.

Blowing their own trumpet...but will there be enough accommodation in South Africa?

PR frenzy

The nine provinces have all embarked on a PR frenzy. Eastern Cape, for example, the second-largest province, is branding itself as the "ultimate adventure destination". That label may turn out to be a bad joke if the likes of England, Germany and Ivory Coast do not take the expected three points from their trips down to the new stadium in Port Elizabeth.

The uncomfortable evidence of sports/tourism statistics down the years is that for all the extra thousands who flood a country during, say, a World Cup, an equal number stay away for precisely that same reason.

More, the global recession has affected sharply the western world's sports-tourist constituency and World Cup price hikes have exacerbated the disincentive to travel from one end of the world to the other.

South African government officials have an irritating habit of proclaiming "we are ready", yet it is clear that accommodation and transport provision is not. Such PR overkill is not only unnecessary, it's insulting to every visitor's intelligence.

What matters is not empty talk of being ready now, but being ready on June 11. ●

SOUTH AFRICA'S WORLD CUP STADIA

Where all the action is taking place this summer

Peter Mokaba Stadium, Polokwane

Ellis Park Stadium, Johannesburg

Free State Stadium, Bloemfontein

Loftus Versfeld Stadium, Pretoria

Mbombela Stadium, Nelspruit

Cape Town Stadium, Cape Town

Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium, Port Elizabeth

Royal Bafokeng Sports Palace, Rustenburg

Soccer City, Johannesburg

Moses Mabhida Stadium, Durban

The joy of six...Barcelona pose with their perfect haul of silverware

Six out of six

Barcelona's record-breaking 2009 will be hard to repeat in 2010

SID LOWE in Madrid

FOR REAL MADRID, the best thing about 2009 was that it did, eventually, draw to a close. For Barcelona, that could be their only complaint. Their task now is to dominate in another year too, to ensure that this is not a one-off, to build a lasting legacy.

The cliche says getting to the top is one thing, staying there is even harder; that the second season is even more difficult than the first.

For Barcelona, doing it all again is, coach Pep Guardiola warned, impossible. But that is what they must attempt.

When Liverpool won the league, manager Bob Paisley, shuffling along in his carpet slippers, used to hand out the medals from an old shoebox, unceremoniously and in private. Barcelona paraded theirs before a packed Camp Nou, fireworks

exploding around them on the first weekend of 2010. Yet Guardiola has tried to adopt that same attitude. As the players celebrated winning the Club World Cup, their T-shirts declared: *"Tot guanyat, tot per guanyar"* (everything won, everything to win).

Tot guanyat was no exaggeration. Barcelona were officially champions of the world but the significance of victory against Estudiantes was not the Final in itself, nor the trophy, but that it completed the perfect circle. It maintained and prolonged their glory beyond the summer and made the whole of 2009 theirs, not just the 2008-09 season.

In July, Real Madrid's directors had congratulated Florentino Perez on ensuring that Barcelona's treble would be the shortest in history. By buying Cristiano Ronaldo and Kaka, attention had shifted immediately from Catalonia to Castilla, and the Catalans' warm glow lasted barely a week. And yet, by finishing the year still top of the table, by winning in Monaco, Bilbao, Barcelona and Abu Dhabi, Barça had wrested it back; they had made their success last.

> **"No side will ever better the achievements of Barcelona in 2009"**

Before the Final of the Club World Cup, Guardiola had told his players: "Lose and you'll still be the best team in the world; win and you'll be eternal." Victory against Estudiantes was an appropriate way to round off the year: another final, another trophy. Six in total. Out of six.

Best of all time

Some are suggesting that this Barca team might be the best of all time and, in terms of success, they may even be right as no side will ever better the achievements of Barcelona in 2009.

In 1972, Ajax won every competition they played, but there were only five of them: Dutch league, European Cup, Dutch Cup, European Supercup and Intercontinental Cup (the equivalent of today's Club World Cup). No one else has ever managed a clean sweep.

Barcelona won it all: Spanish league, Spanish Cup, Champions League, Spanish Supercup, European Supercup and Club World Cup. But there was even more to it than that – 2009 was a year as near to perfect as you can get. It opened with them on the top of the table and closed with them there too. They never left top spot, except on goal difference – and both times, they immediately reclaimed their position.

They had defeated their bitterest rivals Real Madrid 6-2 at the Santiago Bernabeu, they won their first Spanish Cup for over a decade and they also added Rome to European Cup/ Champions League Final successes in Paris and London.

Guardiola's first league game in charge was a 1-0 defeat in Soria against Numancia, the side with the smallest budget in the first division. The man who got the winning goal, Mario, earns less in a year than Thierry Henry does in a week, and the panic was palpable, while the recriminations at choosing a coach with no first division experience instead of Jose Mourinho were intense.

Since then, Barcelona have only lost seven times in all competitions. Guardiola has been in charge for 91 matches and not once have they been beaten by more than one goal. And rarely did defeat matter, even when reverses against Espanyol and Atletico Madrid threatened to open up the title race last season.

Defeats against Mallorca and Osasuna came with the league already won. A 1-0 defeat against Wisla Krakow followed a 4-0 first-leg win and a 3-2 loss against Shakhtar Donetsk came with first place in their Champions League group already assured and reserves on the pitch.

It wasn't always easy. They perhaps should have gone out at Stamford Bridge in the Champions League semi-final. It took a missed Mallorca penalty to keep them in the Spanish Cup and an 88th-minute equaliser to win the Club World Cup – but that showed character as well as quality.

Under Guardiola, Barcelona have scored 220 goals, playing wonderful football. In the Champions League Final, seven of the starting XI were products of La Masia, the club's youth system. So was the man on the bench, Pep Guardiola – Barcelona ballboy, youth-teamer, captain and now coach – and the man crowned FIFA World Player, Lionel Messi.

"Some clubs buy Ballon d'Or winners, we make them," beamed president Joan Laporta.

It really was as good as it gets. The trouble is, how do you follow perfection? The question now is: what comes next? That was exactly the question the coach was asking. As Barcelona collected the Club World Cup, he turned to assistant Tito Vilanova and said, "Where do we go from here?"

There is a kind of curious logic that suggests life for Barcelona is no good precisely because it has been so good; that the pressure of living up to their own successes will derail them. When you have won everything the only thing left to do is lose. Barcelona winning the Club World Cup was almost good for Madrid as it finally closed their cycle. The end of the decade reinforced that feeling.

As if to prove the point, the first weekend back after the Christmas break offered Madrid the chance to go top of the table. Barcelona drew 1-1 with Villarreal – the first time they had dropped points at home all season. Madrid needed only to

beat Osasuna to go top. "New Year, New Leader?" wondered the hopeful sports daily *Marca*.

In truth, it would have been an odd kind of top. Madrid would have been there on goal difference – the measure formally used at this stage of the season – but come May places are decided by head-to-head records and Barcelona have already beaten them this season. In any case, Madrid failed to win. Barcelona began 2010 where they had ended 2008 and spent the whole of 2009: at the top.

"[In terms of the future] things seemed black at the end of the year," said Guardiola. "But having come back from the Christmas break and seen the attitude and hunger of the players, the desire to keep improving, it now looks light grey." The argument that the only way was down had been left in tatters.

Only, it hadn't. Not entirely. Barcelona had stumbled. They had performed poorly and dropped points. They had been fortunate not to be beaten. Still, there were reasons for optimism from Madrid; reasons to believe that Barcelona could not continue where they had left off.

Swinging into action...Real Madrid's Rafael Van Der Vaart (centre) battles against Osasuna

Huge pressure

In the aftermath of victory in Abu Dhabi, Guardiola's mask of serenity slipped for the first time and he burst into tears – a first glimpse of the huge pressure he had been under, a first suggestion, however tentative, that he wasn't quite so in control as everyone thought. He is yet to sign a contract extension with the club and presidential elections loom.

Worse, while Barcelona withstood the demands of an extremely packed fixture list to complete the dream year, this season promises to be even more intense. There is already a hint of tiredness about them, a feeling that they have become slower. The African Nations Cup sees Barcelona lose two of their four central midfielders. In January alone, with Seydou Keita and Yaya Toure out, they will play seven matches – nine if they get through the next round of the Spanish Cup against Sevilla. Madrid will play just five.

> "There is already a hint of tiredness about Barcelona"

If they are to reach the Spanish and Champions League Finals again, Barcelona will play 65 games – three more than last season.

Barcelona's squad is short. Few major additions have been made. Dmytro Chygrynskiy has hardly played, Maxwell is second choice behind Eric Abidal, and Zlatan Ibrahimovic – while enjoying an excellent start – is a direct replacement for Samuel Eto'o. Thierry Henry is a year older and, although Pedro has really stepped up, Bojan's progression appears to be stagnating.

Rotations are becoming fewer too, as the starting XI begins to look entrenched. More minutes are being played by fewer players.

And then there is Madrid. And only Madrid.

Sevilla have struggled to find inspiration when teams sit back against them, collecting just three points from the last 15 (plus they have lost Frederic Kanoute to the African Nations Cup). Valencia look the best bet to finish third but have dropped silly points at home. Deportivo La Coruna simply do not have the creativity. Atletico Madrid's crisis continues and their battle is now to claim a European place or maybe even just to survive. And meanwhile few believe that fourth-placed Mallorca will stay so far up the table – including their miracle-working coach, Gregorio Manzano. As for Villarreal, despite drawing with Barcelona, their awful start has left them with too much ground to make up.

Madrid are a very different proposition to last year and their challenge is a serious one. They are stronger, more talented, more balanced and more dangerous – as indeed they should be after an outlay of more than £200million.

It is no coincidence that the greatest spend in Madrid's history followed the greatest success in Barca's. The rest of the Spanish league has been left trailing but as 2010 begins, the battle for supremacy between the country's two footballing giants promises to be compelling. ●

On target...high-flying Mallorca players celebrate a goal against Bilbao

Dragons' den...Garcia (standing) and team-mates celebrate Benfica's winner against Porto

Benfica eclipse Porto

Is the balance of power shifting back to the capital?

PEDRO PINTO in Lisbon

PORTO'S BID to secure a record-equalling fifth successive league title suffered a setback when the defending champions lost 1-0 to Benfica at the Estadio da Luz.

In a wet and windy night in Lisbon, the Dragons misfired, and a solitary first-half goal from Argentinian forward Javier Saviola settled the contest, leaving Porto four points behind Benfica and Sporting Braga – the joint leaders at the Christmas break.

Benfica's triumph was the latest in a long list of impressive results since Jorge Jesus took over last summer. The Reds have one of Europe's top attacks – with 38 goals in 14 league matches – and have been scoring for fun in the Europa League, even managing to put six past Everton in a group game.

Some stellar performances at home and abroad have given Benfica hope that a five-year championship drought might come to an end this year.

The secret to Jesus' success has been to rely on a core of 12 to 14 players who have played practically every game and morphed into a solid unit. With a tight back four led by veteran Luisao, and former Real Madrid midfielder Javi Garcia playing the role of anchor, the coach has seen the best of the creative talents of Pablo Aimar and Angel Di Maria. The striking partnership of Saviola and Oscar Cardozo has also been on fire, yielding 21 goals so far this season.

> "Benfica fans hope that a five-year championship drought might come to an end"

In contrast, just a couple of miles away, at the Alvalade Stadium, Sporting Lisbon supporters have been enduring their side's worse start to a season in nearly a decade.

Dismal run

A dismal run of three wins in their opening 10 league games led to the resignation of coach Paulo Bento, who had been at the club since 2005. He was replaced by former Vitoria Setubal and Maritimo coach Carlos Carvalhal, who inherited a side sitting in sixth place and facing the prospect of finishing outside the top three for the first time since 1999.

In order to stop the rot, the Lions need to get Liedson scoring again. The naturalized Portugal international, who has been Sporting's top scorer for the last five seasons, has struggled to find his form this term, scoring just four league goals so far. As a team, Sporting managed only 15 goals in their opening 14 games.

One of Carvalhal's former sides, Braga, continue to shine under the leadership of 40-year-old coach Domingos Paciencia. Boasting Europe's best defence, with just six goals conceded, Braga keep grinding out wins and have everyone thinking that they could be good enough to win the title for the first time in their history – which would be quite an achievement for a side that has never finished higher than fourth.

Former Newcastle United and Valencia midfielder Hugo Viana has been enjoying an Indian summer in the north of Portugal with Braga, where he doesn't have the pressure of having to live up to high expectations.

His performances have led to many pundits demanding his return to the national team, especially with Deco struggling for fitness.

Portugal's struggle to qualify for the World Cup finals has raised concerns that there is not enough quality or versatility in midfield. With Tiago continually failing to deliver, Viana – who hasn't played for Portugal in nearly two years – could be a valid option in South Africa. ●

Montpellier hit on a winning formula

The unfashionable team from the south were in third place at the winter break

REGULAR FOLLOWERS of French football were rubbing their eyes in disbelief as the domestic season headed for its traditional winter break. While it was of no particular surprise that Bordeaux were at the top of the pile, what was utterly unbelievable was to see unfashionable Montpellier sitting pretty in third place.

The south-coast outfit only rejoined the French elite at the end of last season, when they were promoted from the second tier as runners-up to Lens, and nobody gave them a second thought as potential contenders at the top end of the table.

And yet here they are: a point behind second-placed Lille and with a game in hand.

Rene Girard – a long-standing coach at various levels with the French Football Federation – took over at the club after Montpellier had secured promotion under Rolland Courbis at the end of May.

Courbis is a legend of the French game, but he had announced his intention to step down at the end of last season no matter what, saying he needed a break from football.

He left behind a team that had some quality, but which everyone agreed would need plenty of luck and no little application in order to stay in the top flight after a five-year absence.

Girard kept the nucleus of the promoted side, then added a couple of gnarly old Ligue 1 veterans in left-sided attacker Geoffrey Dernis from Saint-Etienne and former Nice defender Cyril Jeunechamp to give them some beef. It's not a formula that anyone believed would have reaped such major rewards. And yet Montpellier have since proved themselves a tidy little unit as they've climbed the table.

Built on a solid defence, this hasn't stopped Montpellier from producing some enjoyable football based around a philosophy of putting pressure on the opposition by working the ball as far up the field as possible.

Colombian forward Victor Montano has led the attacking line with aplomb, while France Under-21 striker Karim Ait-Fana has also caught the eye as Montpellier have defied all expectations so far.

It would be unrealistic to expect Montpellier to maintain such a lofty position right through to the end of the campaign, of course. But then again, it was equally unrealistic to expect Montpellier to be in third at this stage of the season, with 10 wins under their belts, so don't count anything out.

Lyon slump

As crazy as Montpellier's rise has been, however, so has the fall of Lyon. After Bordeaux put an end to a seven-year league-title winning streak at the end of last season, things have gone from bad to worse for Claude Puel's men. A 1-0 home defeat in a turgid game against Bordeaux in mid-December saw Lyon slump to as low as ninth in the table.

Crisis time? Possibly, especially when Bernard Lacombe, a former Lyon player and right-hand man to president Jean-Michel Aulas, publicly slaughtered the club's players. "Our team is utterly average," said Lacombe. "And we could do with players who actually talk about the game rather than the last car they bought."

> "As crazy as Montpellier's rise has been, so has the fall of Lyon"

Clearly Lacombe believes there's too much cash swilling around and not enough passion for the game at his club just now.

Money, though, has been one of the key topics of conversation among football people in France of late, especially when reviled national coach Raymond Domenech was revealed to have banked £750,000 for his not-very-impressive work in getting France to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

"Not that much when compared to Fabio Capello," screamed the Federation.

"Quite a lot when all Domenech has won is a division two title in France and an Under-21 competition in Toulon," came the tart response.

Had Domenech produced a decent team, and not been such a misery guts with the press, perhaps the response to his salary would have been different.

The collective guilt felt about Thierry Henry's flagrant handball, which robbed the Republic of Ireland of their chance of World Cup qualification, didn't help Domenech's cause much either.

But at least it looks like somebody up there likes him. After all, how else can you explain why France were subsequently drawn against Uruguay, Mexico and South Africa in Group A, one of the easiest of the eight World Cup pools?

"So it turns out that the French Federation were right to keep Domenech after all," said former international Christophe Dugarry following the draw, his tongue firmly in his cheek.

"They'll never find another coach as lucky as this one!" ●

Hitting the heights...Montpellier celebrate beating Lyon in December

The results business

Two foreign coaches experience differing fortunes

GREECE

LOU ECONOMOPOULOS in Athens

COACHES HENK TEN CATE and Otto Rehhagel discovered the true meaning of losing and winning in Greece. Panathinaikos boss Ten Cate was sacked following a 2-0 loss at arch-rivals Olympiakos – a defeat that cost his team top spot in the league – and national team supremo Rehhagel found a shock 1-0 win in Ukraine restored the Euro 2004 winner to the status of local hero.

Ten Cate was hired in June 2008 to build a championship side to put an end to the Olympiakos dynasty on the domestic front.

However, the new club president, shipping magnate Nikos Pateras, did not have any more patience and, despite the team progressing to the last 32 of the Europa League, Ten Cate was fired. He got the call from Pateras the day before his 55th birthday and later said he thought the president was ringing to wish him happy birthday!

The Dutchman, who had six months remaining on his contract, was often criticised for too much rotation of players on the pitch, which often led to poor results.

After his dismissal, he said in a statement: "It has been an honour for me to work with Panathinaikos and the results support my work.

"I have laid the groundwork for this team. I respect the fact that some people may not be happy with the general picture, but my assistants and I have given everything to succeed.

"The president's decision will not affect our relationship and the friendship we have developed.

"I would also like to thank all Panathinaikos fans for their support and wish the team to win the title."

Ten Cate's overall record in charge at Panathinaikos stood at 45 victories, 17 draws and 13 losses before he was replaced by Greece Under-21 coach Nikos Nioplias. Prior to taking up his post in Athens, Ten Cate was the assistant manager at Chelsea under Avram Grant, in 2007-2008, and he also had a spell at Barcelona under Frank Rijkaard when the Catalan club won the Champions League and La Liga. He also served as manager of Ajax in 2007.

Showdown...Rehhagel puts his players through their paces before the game in Donetsk

"It has been an honour for me to work with Panathinaikos"

Henk Ten Cate

In fairness you can't really blame Ten Cate for the defeat at Olympiakos as he and his players were not in the best of psychological condition going into the game after having to wait for an hour in the team bus near Karaiskakis Stadium while Olympiakos fans fought with police and blocked the road leading to the venue.

Panathinaikos goalkeeper Alexandros Tzorvas also claimed after the match that he was the target of airgun pellets and even went to the Piraeus prosecutor to prove that he was hit several times, showing marks on his body as well as presenting medical reports.

Panathinaikos sent a detailed letter of protest to the Greek league about the incident, which also included a penknife being thrown on the pitch as well as numerous flares.

Non-attacking style

Meanwhile, 71-year-old Rehhagel got the Greek media and fans back on side after withstanding some harsh criticism of his non-attacking style of football; one which concentrates on defence – just as it did back in 2004 when Greece shocked the world by winning the European Championship.

After a poor showing at the 2005 Confederations Cup, failing to qualify for the 2006 World Cup and doing little to defend their crown at Euro 2008, the German coach was also attacked for keeping too many of his players from the successful Euro 2004 team and relying on other players who were not getting first-team games with their clubs.

On top of all that, Greece were supposed to qualify from their World

Cup 2010 group with ease, but instead they found themselves cast in the role of underdogs in the play-off with Ukraine.

A 0-0 draw at home in the first encounter did little to keep the critics off Rehhagel's back, but a solitary goal from Dimitris Salpigidis in frozen Donetsk, along with some masterful defensive tactics, sent Greece to South Africa with only their second World Cup qualification (the first was in 1994, when they failed to win or even score a goal in the US).

That victory marked Rehhagel's 100th match as coach of the national side and it was celebrated with a surprise cake from his players on board the charter plane bringing them back to Athens.

"He is a man of few words. He is very happy about making it to the World Cup and was very touched by the surprise from the team," said Greek Football Federation president Sophocles Pilavios upon his arrival home with the players from Ukraine.

Striker Angelos Charisteas was keen to add his support, saying: "This team knows how to give answers when it receives criticism. On numerous occasions we have shown that in difficult times we have managed well."

Midfielder Kostas Katsouranis said that the criticism was beneficial to the team, claiming: "Let there be criticism, but it's best to think before talking. We had reached the point where they would kill us if we did not qualify."

And fellow midfielder Giorgos Karagounis said many people underestimated the team, adding: "We had heavy criticism, which did us some good. But at the end we showed character. It was a big win and we dedicate it to all the Greeks. We never said we play super football, but we have accomplished a lot."

Rehhagel, who has a record of 52 wins, 22 draws and 26 defeats with the national side since taking the job in 2001, told weekly Athens newspaper *FAQ*: "The Greeks make one mistake: they are too sentimental. When they win, they are full of euphoria. When they lose, they want to throw everything in the sea.

"In Greece, if you do not do well in two matches, you fall in the eyes of the public." ●

The new goal

Having declared their independence, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are now trying to establish their footballing identities

> "While Abkhazia's own split with Georgia has so far been peaceful, the secession of South Ossetia led to two wars"

TANIA ANRI MAY have thought his professional football career was taking off when he signed for Russian club Zhemchuzhina-Sochi in 2003, but the dream quickly ended. Besieged by financial problems, the Russian second division side collapsed into bankruptcy and he returned to the amateur league in Abkhazia, which had been set up after the rebel enclave broke from Georgia in 1994.

Anri played for a side called Nart – who are based in the Abkhazian capital Sukhumi – and, after being voted Abkhazia's player of the year in 2008, he was offered a second chance to play abroad once more – this time for Yenicami Agdelen in the politically unrecognised state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

"My dream is to play in the Premier League in Britain, but to start with I come to play in Northern Cyprus," said Anri on arriving. Yet after just 10 games he returned to Abkhazia.

Having turned down offers from clubs in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, Anri is back with Nart once more – but this year he will play in the Russian league as Nart are all set to be re-named Dynamo Sukhum and hope to join the Russian system.

Overseas adventure... Anri (second right) in action for Yenicami Agdelen

The original Dinamo Sukhumi played in the lower leagues of the Soviet system but were dissolved when Georgia declared independence from Russia in 1991.

But while Abkhazia's own split from Georgia has so far been peaceful, the secession of another Georgian enclave, South Ossetia, in 1990, led to two wars.

Bigger ambitions

In 1993, Tskhovrebov Vladislav Arsenovich set up a football association in South Ossetia but the breakaway state's most senior side had bigger ambitions.

Spartak Tskhinvali had played in the Georgian league and won the Georgian Cup in 1987, but that ended with South Ossetia's independence and the club joined the league in the neighbouring Russian republic of North Ossetia-Alania.

A second conflict over South Ossetia in 2008 made staying alive rather than playing football a priority, but a league was played in 2009 with a Spartak Tskhinval XI pipping Dzau and Znaur to the title.

But while Tskhinvali are unlikely to give up playing in North Ossetia-Alania, Arsenovich, who remains chairman of the South Ossetian FA, is keen to develop the game.

Around 300 young players aged from seven to 17 train at an academy in South Ossetia and a 6,000-seat stadium, built to FIFA standards, is expected to be completed by 2011.

However, it is unlikely that there will be any international visitors. While only Russia, Nicaragua and Venezuela accept the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, FIFA sanctions would quickly be imposed should any of the trio attempt to uphold this recognition and take it into the sporting ties. ●

Bayer's time?

Winter champions Leverkusen are making a strong bid for their first Bundesliga title

RHINELAND-BASED global pharmaceutical giant Bayer must have enjoyed the end-of-year festivities. The company's balance sheet is standing up well to the recession, they recently won an award for an anti-thrombosis drug and their football team, Bayer Leverkusen, are making a strong bid for a first-ever Bundesliga crown, going into the winter break top of the table and undefeated.

Over the last two decades, the *Leverkusener* have proved to be the ultimate in championship bluffers: so often in the shake-up for honours, only to be ultimately unmasked as imposters. This time around, though, it could be different.

While their traditional virtues of youthful exuberance and straight-for-the-jugular attacking flair continue to be sacrosanct, new coach Jupp Heynckes has crucially managed to do what many thought impossible: add more resilience, pragmatism and consistency to these young lions.

When their free-flowing style breaks down, they now know how to win ugly, and central to their new-found taste for the battlefield is veteran Finland centre-back Sami Hyypia, who since arriving on a Bosman free from Liverpool last summer has rapidly established himself as the best in his position in the Bundesliga. How his old Anfield boss, Rafa Benitez, must wish he could still call on the indomitable Finn to steady the ship. Washed up? So is an iceberg.

With prolific striker Stefan Kiessling (arguably the most in-vogue player of the autumn), attacking midfielders of the calibre of German boy wonder Toni Kroos and Swiss wide-man Tranquillo Barnetta, and a block-house defence built around Hyypia and brilliant young Germany keeper Rene Adler, Bayer have the look of a side ready for the long haul.

However, they can take nothing for granted. Neither of their two previous stints as "Winter Champions", in 1993-94 and 2001-02, presaged a title in May and for all their excellent work this term, their advantage at the shutdown was anything but gargantuan, with second-placed Schalke only a point in arrears and Bayern Munich just two behind.

Last rites

Bayern coach Louis Van Gaal had gone into the final Champions League group game against Juventus knowing that his fate was on the line as even the club's most partisan supporters would have regarded home and away defeats to Bordeaux as tantamount to the last rites.

Yet rather than a one-way trip to the mortuary – in these parts the Europa League is thought to be as enticing as a holiday in the Gulag – Bayern went into improbable fightback mode, first recording a battling 1-0 win at home to Maccabi Haifa, then clinching a spot in the knockout stage of the competition courtesy of a come-from-behind 4-1 win at Juventus – the first time they had ever triumphed in Turin.

A seemingly never-ending sequence of stodgy, colourless performances in the Bundesliga, a far from happy fan base, plus several episodes of dissent within the squad – notably concerning skipper Philipp Lahm and Italian striker Luca Toni – had severely weakened Van Gaal's position.

But an early Champions League exit would have been the last straw after splashing out £70million on new players last summer.

Not that there is any chance of Van Gaal being jettisoned now. The comprehensive defeat of Juventus was his team's most cohesive and enterprising performance of the season and, domestically too, the signs are most encouraging.

The 4-2-2-2 system featuring Mario Gomez and Ivica Olic up front, with Bastian Schweinsteiger in a new role as a deep-lying central midfielder, is clicking into gear.

After constant changes in personnel – aside from the faith placed in giant Belgian defender Daniel Van Buyten, who has been so tremendously effective at either end of the pitch – Van Gaal is finally reaping the benefit of a settled side.

Who would have thought it possible that a Bayern minus its two main creators – long-term injury victims Franck Ribery and Arjen Robben – could so spectacularly turn the corner?

Nor will anyone be rushing to write off Schalke's chances of planting their flag on the Bundesliga summit next spring. As he proved in leading unfashionable Wolfsburg to the title last term, coach Felix Magath may be the antithesis of a footballing "Renaissance Man", wedded for life to old-school virtues of fitness, graft, discipline and long ball, but he undeniably holds the patent for assembling teams which live and breathe over-achievement.

> "Magath truly is an alchemist. A wave of his magic wand and Schalke suddenly develop a backbone on their travels"

Start delivering

Magath truly is an alchemist. A wave of his magic wand and Schalke suddenly develop a backbone on their travels. An abracadabra is the signal for key players – attackers Kevin Kuranyi and Jefferson Farfan, and Brazilian oldie centre-back Marcelo Bordon – to leap from their sporting sick bed and start delivering in spades.

Pull back the curtain and behold a fine clutch of novice first-teamers,

Spring in his step... Leverkusen's Gonzalo Castro bounds past Hertha Berlin's Cicero (left) and Nemanja Pejcinovic

especially defender Carlos Zambrano and midfielders Lukas Schmitz, Christoph Moritz and Joel Matip.

The Bundesliga's age-old tradition for suspense-filled final acts seems in safe hands. Compared to most of the cartel-dominated major European leagues, the talent is more evenly distributed in the German top flight and this is borne out by the standings. A mere 11 points separate Leverkusen from Eintracht Frankfurt in 10th, and clubs such as Hoffenheim, Hamburg, Werder Bremen and Dortmund all see themselves as genuine contenders for a Champions League qualifying spot.

Down in the relegation zone, the picture is equally unclear. At least eight clubs – Hertha Berlin, Nurnberg, Bochum, Stuttgart, Hannover, Koln Freiburg, and Gladbach – could yet feel the hangman's noose, with the capital city club by far the most at risk.

Abysmal from first to last, Hertha won just once before the mid-winter break and, 10 points off safety, the dye would appear to be cast. ●

Fired up...terrace troublemakers suddenly appear to be in great demand

Gang mentality

Hooligans offered trips to the World Cup finals

ARGENTINA

ERIC WEIL in Buenos Aires

WHEN DIEGO MARADONA took charge of Argentina's national team last March, his training staff – lead by general manager Carlos Bilardo – enlisted a "gang" to support the team, with promises that they would be taken to the World Cup in South Africa. This group consisted mainly of past and present Boca Juniors and Estudiantes de La Plata hooligans, most of who had lengthy police records.

Following complaints after the World Cup qualifier at home to Brazil, an investigation began into how almost 3,000 people with tickets were unable to gain entry to Rosario Central's stadium for the match while the gang went in with tickets marked "protocol" (invitation). The Argentinian Football Association (AFA) claimed this was nothing to do with them – yet before the next home World Cup qualifier, against Peru, an official was reported to have left the AFA with tickets to distribute to the gang.

Not to be outdone, the government is also preparing to take hooligans to the World Cup. Their gang consists of fans from Independiente, Huracan, Velez Sarsfield, Lanus, Tigre, Rosario Central, Argentinos Juniors, Chacarita Juniors, Gimnasia y Esgrima de La Plata and Santa Fe's Colon, with more from other clubs likely to join. Although government sources denied this at first, the truth of the matter was later confirmed by those involved.

The government has promised to take 280 hooligans to South Africa, but this may be increased to 500 if there is no further trouble at matches before the summer. Those involved must also support the government politically at stadiums, on the streets and at rallies, and at recent matches banners reading "*Hinchas Unidas Argentinas*" (united Argentinian fans) and "*Kirchner vuelve*" (which calls for the return of the current prime minister, Cristina Kirchner, in the 2011 elections) have been evident.

Government officials have said they want the hooligans to become "social agents" who, instead of causing trouble, will keep order at matches. If this happens, then all well and good. But how likely is it really?

The weekend after the government offer was announced, there was fighting among hooligans at two of the 10 top-flight games. And while many of the hooligans may behave so as not to be excluded from the trip to South Africa, once they are there it could be a different story.

> **"While many hooligans may behave so as not to be excluded from the trip to South Africa, once they are there it may be a different story"**

Added to this, don't forget there are still a majority of hooligans from other clubs – and from the lower divisions – who are not included in the deal and, as the World Cup approaches, it is possible there will be fighting among the hooligans when it becomes apparent that not everyone will be able to go to South Africa.

No strings attached

You will note the absence of the big hooligan gangs of River Plate and Boca Juniors from the government initiative; this is because they claim to be making their own arrangements, with no strings attached, and so far Boca say they have 50 places while River have 30. Hooligans at both clubs pressure players and other fans into giving them money and, with this also being done at other clubs, it is possible that there could be over 1,000 Argentinian hooligans going to this summer's World Cup. At least South Africa has a very tough police force which hopefully will deal with any trouble in their particular way.

Last, but by no means least, there is the question of what will happen after the World Cup?

If the government wants the continued support of the gangs for the general election in 2011 it will have to hand out more cash (which is what the hooligans are most interested in). Yet this, along with the money it is losing since it obtained the TV rights to supposedly televise football "free for all" – which is estimated to have cost over £13.5million in the first two months – will make a huge hole in the economy. A court is investigating the misuse of public funds but, with the government involved, the case is unlikely to get very far.

Despite every top-division match being televised live for "free" on the state channel from Friday to Monday – even though a large part of the country can only see games by paying cable TV companies – there appears to be a boycott by private companies willing to buy advertising space.

Keeping the peace on the terraces, like the initiative to make televised games freely available to all, looks all set to become an increasingly expensive exercise for the powers that be in Argentina. ●

New beginnings

Clubs quit second-tier USL to join new NASL

CANADA

PHILIPPE GERMAIN in Montreal

A MAJOR SHAKE-UP in lower-tier professional football in North America is opening the doors for the future expansion of the Canadian game while setting up a new order south of the border.

A handful of disgruntled Canadian and US club owners have taken their destiny into their own hands by creating a North American second division – to be called the North American Soccer League (NASL) – with the first season due to get under way in April, despite an initial refusal by the US Soccer Federation to grant the new league second tier status.

"By going with NASL, we're obligated to operate our league at a high standard befitting a name that means so much to the soccer community throughout North America," says Selby Wellman, owner of Carolina RailHawks and the league's newly appointed chairman.

The original NASL was born in the late 1960s out of a merger between the FIFA-sanctioned United Soccer Association and the unsanctioned National Professional Soccer League, and attracted playing legends such as Pele, Johan Cruyff, Giorgio Chinaglia and Franz Beckenbauer to its ranks.

The league folded after the 1984 season when only two clubs, including Toronto Blizzard, were in a position to resume for another season and it was not until 1990 that a "coast-to-coast" league came back to life with the arrival of the 22-team American Professional Soccer League and then Major League Soccer (MLS) in 1996.

Of the new NASL's 10 teams, six of them – Canadian clubs Montreal Impact and Vancouver Whitecaps, plus US counterparts Rochester Rhinos, Miami FC, Minnesota Thunder and Carolina RailHawks – walked out on the United Soccer League (USL) First Division, which had been the official second tier of US football since MLS began.

This mass transfer happened after a failed bid by club owners to purchase the USL from sportswear giants Nike, who inherited the league after buying rival Umbro in 2007. The conflict was sparked by Nike selling the league to Atlanta-based NuRock Soccer Holdings last summer.

"It's very disappointing that Nike decided to sell to a group that was unheard of instead of selling to the group of owners," says Joey Saputo, chairman of the Montreal Impact.

Club owners argue that USL management preferred quantity over quality and were happy to accept such flaky owners as Dmitry Piterman, who operated California Victory as a mirror side to Spanish second-tier club Alaves.

Piterman disappeared before the end of his side's inaugural season, after which the club folded and the league had to pay the players' salaries in the final weeks of the campaign.

High flier...Roberto Brown of Montreal Impact (in blue) is brought down by Vancouver Whitecaps' Shaun Pejic

Jumping on board

The four other clubs jumping on board the new NASL are AC St Louis, a new entity run by former lawyer Jeff Cooper who failed in his attempt to join MLS; Tampa Bay Rowdies, a team due to begin activities in the USL in 2010 thus resurrecting the side that played in the famed NASL between 1975 and 1984; Crystal Palace Baltimore, part of the player-development system of the English Championship club which has been part of the USL Second Division (American third tier) for the last three seasons; and Atlanta Silverbacks, a side born in 1995 and resuming its activities following a conflict last summer with the USL.

> "Hopes are high for a new golden age of professional soccer in the Great White North"

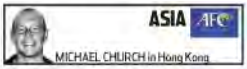
Hopes are high that the new NASL could herald a golden age of professional soccer in the Great White North unseen since 1981, when five Canadian clubs (Montreal, Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton) where part of the original NASL.

By 2012, Canada will have three MLS sides and Edmonton Drillers are set to take over the Vancouver spot once the Whitecaps join MLS in 2011. Montreal are also expected to make the move to the top flight in 2011 or 2012, and will probably "pass on" their place in the new second division to a reserve team, possibly from Quebec City or Ottawa. ●

Gong show...AFC president Hammam gives Endo his Player of the Year award

Tainted prize

Yasuhito Endo may have been named Asian Player of the Year, but the award has become devalued in recent years



MICHAEL CHURCH in Hong Kong

GAMBA OSAKA midfielder Yasuhito Endo was named AFC Player of the Year for 2009 and, in being named the continent's finest performer, he joins a list of Japanese players that includes two-time winner Hidetoshi Nakata, UEFA Cup winner Shinji Ono, former Japan captain Masami Ihara and Kazuyoshi Miura.

The 30-year-old was chosen ahead of compatriot Kengo Nakamura, as well as Iran's Hadi Aghily, Firas Al Khatib of Syria and Sayed Mohamed Adnan from Bahrain.

But missing from the list of nominees once again were players of the calibre of Manchester United's South Korea midfielder Park Ji-sung and Shunsuke Nakamura, currently with Espanyol in Spain but who won three Scottish league titles in a row with Celtic. The refusal of the AFC president Mohamed Bin Hammam to allow players who feature for clubs outside the continent to be considered for the award continues to devalue what was once one of the most coveted prizes in the Asian game.

Endo's success this time was not without controversy, with even the player himself questioning his nomination for the award 12 months after a season when he was favourite to claim the title before losing out to Uzbekistan's Server Djeparov.

"I don't know why I've been nominated," he said the day before being handed the award. "I don't really understand the criteria."

And therein lies the problem. In an attempt to make the award less subjective than it might have been in the past, the AFC has concocted a convoluted criteria that sees players awarded points by match commissioners at each of the games administered by the confederation, with these tallied up at the end of the year to determine the winner of the award.

> "I don't know why I've been nominated. I don't really understand the criteria"
>
> *Yasuhito Endo*

As a result, Endo claimed the title at an annual awards ceremony dominated by players, coaches and teams from the east of the continent.

"I would like to thank the AFC for this award," he said. "This is a big honour for me.

"I was here last year but, unfortunately, I wasn't able to win. However, I am very happy to win this year.

"I hope I can be a role model for young players everywhere and give hope to others in Asian football."

South Korea coach Huh Jung-moo, meanwhile, was named Coach of the Year after he steered his side to the finals of this summer's World Cup, while another Korean, Celtic-bound Ki Sung-yong, won the AFC Youth Player of the Year award.

Lucrative extension

Meanwhile, just six months after successfully fighting off a challenge to his position at the head of the confederation, Hammam signed a lucrative eight-year extension to the body's marketing and television deal with World Sport Group.

The new deal, which commences in 2013 and runs until 2020, is worth a total of $1billion – the most lucrative in Asian sport – and sees the two bodies continue a relationship that began back in 1993.

"Asian football is scaling new heights and it is the AFC's pleasure to renew our tight relationship with WSG, who were the first ones to recognise the incredible potential of the Asian game," said the AFC president.

"This is a landmark deal and shows what Asian football is capable of achieving. WSG have been steadfast in their commitment to AFC and have played a significant role in popularising the Asian game worldwide."

The impending deal had been a bone of contention for several parties within the opposition to Hammam earlier in the year. These had rallied around the candidacy of Sheikh Salman Al Khalifa of Bahrain as he challenged Hammam for his seat on the FIFA Executive Committee.

Hammam, however, won the election by just two votes after earlier threatening to stand down from his post as president of the confederation if he had lost. ●

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Mourinho's

The pressure is on Internazionale's coach to deliver the club's first European Cup for 45 years – starting against his old club Chelsea in the first knockout round. By Paddy Agnew

way

AFTER ALL THOSE Christmas-time declarations of love for the English game, is Jose Mourinho ironically about to prove himself the *salvatore* (saviour) of another patria entirely, namely Italy?

As we head into 2010, there is no doubt that Italian football badly needs a good result in either the Champions League or this summer's World Cup to arrest the impression that the national game is well and truly launched on the path of decline and fall.

Internazionale coach Mourinho may well have little impact on Italy's campaign in South Africa, but he is clearly in the driving seat when it comes to leading the Italian challenge

Laid back...Mourinho looks unfazed as Inter's season reaches its decisive stage

in the Champions League. His Inter side are, of course, headed for a suggestive first knockout round tie with his former club, Chelsea.

The draw prompted the 46-year-old to take a walk down memory lane, revisiting Stamford Bridge on a spying mission which generated a series of comments about how much he would, one day, like to return to English football. But before Chelsea fans start concluding that this means Mourinho will not be fully concentrated on the task in hand in their Champions League clash, it might be worth reflecting on another of his many festive interviews.

Asked by Italian state TV, RAI, just what he thought he might have given to the Italian game, Mourinho replied: "Well, according to what I read and I hear around here, little or nothing. But I didn't come to Italy to transmit something to your football. I came here to win trophies for my club."

Replaced Mancini

Ever since Mourinho surprisingly replaced Roberto Mancini – days after the latter had won his third consecutive league title with Inter in the summer of 2008 – we have all known which particular trophy oil-rich club owner Massimo Moratti wants to win.

Mourinho, winner of the UEFA Cup and Champions League with Porto, was brought in to win Europe's premier club trophy, something which has been missing from the Inter sideboard for 45 years now. Asked by RAI just how he expected the Chelsea tie to work out, Mourinho gave an unusually cautious, non-committal answer: "The Champions League is full of big question marks. It depends on so many things. It's true that Chelsea are a side with few secrets for me. We've drawn one of the strongest teams possible. But then they too have drawn one of the strongest teams possible. Remember, in football, for 90 minutes, you have no old friends."

This time last year, of course, Inter went out tamely to Manchester United, beaten 2-0 at Old Trafford after an unimpressive autumn campaign which had ended with embarrassing defeats by Panathinaikos and Werder Bremen. Those who watched the reigning European champions Barcelona play Inter off the pitch in a 2-0 win at Camp Nou in November will be tempted to conclude that nothing much has changed.

Inter might rule the roost in sub-standard Italy, but they are no heavyweights when it comes to European competition, you might conclude. Yet, that is not the full picture. The significant difference between last season and this concerns the impressive manner in which Inter won two "do or die" ties, away to Dynamo Kyiv and at home to Rubin Kazan. Remember, this was a tough, very tight group which Barcelona won with the lowest points tally (11) of all the eight groups.

For an Inter side which never played well in Europe last season, the good news was that the Champions League hoodoo may have been partly laid. If Inter were in control, looking impressive in their 2-0 final-game win over Kazan, their earlier last-ditch 2-1 away win over Kyiv owed everything to desperate, defiant – if not always elegant – determination. Not for nothing, Mourinho sees these two games as fundamental to his season so far, praising the "personality" shown by his team on both occasions.

Obstacle...Chelsea's John Terry (left) awaits Inter

> **We've drawn one of the strongest teams but they too have drawn one of the strongest teams**
>
> *Jose Mourinho on Inter's clash with Chelsea*

New-found conviction

If there is any reason to hold out hope for Inter against the awesome obstacle of Chelsea, it has to be linked to that new-found sense of conviction in Europe. Inter hopes, too, are inevitably linked to the personnel changes effected this summer. The club might have lost Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, but the contributions so far of five key new men – Brazilian defender Lucio, Dutch playmaker Wesley Sneijder, Brazilian midfielder Thiago Motta, Argentinian striker Diego Milito and Cameroon forward Samuel Eto'o – suggest that this Inter is stronger than ever.

League results hint at the same thing. In December 2008, Inter were top of the table on 42 points, six clear of Juventus and nine clear of Milan. One year later, Inter were still top of the table, admittedly with fewer points, 39, but with a greater lead, being eight points clear of second-place Milan. Along the way, too, there have been impressive performances including a 4-0 derby win in August and a 5-0 away win against Genoa in October.

Furthermore, a 1-0 win away to Chievo in the first Serie A game of the new year showed that Inter intend to continue where they left off before Christmas. Minus Eto'o, Motta, Serbia's Dejan Stankovic and Argentinian midfielder Esteban Cambiasso, Inter did the business in the manner that has been their

Winning ways...[from left] Mourinho hoists the Premier League trophy with Chelsea, the Serie A trophy with Inter and the Champions League trophy with Porto

Loyal boss...Mourinho always stands by his players. Here it's Sulley Muntari

No nonsense...Mourinho makes himself clear to Eto'o

trademark under Mourinho: not necessarily very elegant or impressive, but ruthlessly efficient, winning on this occasion thanks to a goal on the counter attack.

In the meantime, with Eto'o called up for African Nations Cup duty, Inter have added another weapon to their armoury in Lazio's talented Macedonian striker Goran Pandev, who made an entirely satisfactory debut against Chievo. Hereby hangs a whole other tale because Pandev's time at Lazio ended in the most acrimonious manner possible, with Lazio threatening legal action against Inter (see Headliners, page 19).

Not that such disputes are likely to distract Mourinho and Inter as the club focus on that Champions League tie with Chelsea and a fifth consecutive title.

This has not been done since the days of the great Torino side of the war years, a team which won all the championships from 1943 through to 1949 (allowing for the two war-torn seasons of 1944 and 1945 when the league programme was cancelled).

Nor are Mourinho's regular little skirmishes with colleagues and media alike destined to prove a distraction to his team. Inter fans (and players) have come to realise that various little run-ins with Claudio Ranieri, Carlo Ancelotti, referees or whoever, serve splendidly to take the heat off his players.

The most recent in a long line of Mourinho "specials" came after his side had been held to a 1-1 draw by Atalanta in December, in a game marked by the sending-off of Sneijder. As the Portuguese coach sat in the team bus after the match brooding on a less than perfect game by his team, he was annoyed to see *Corriere Dello Sport* journalist Andrea Ramazzotti "invade" the private space beside the bus, roped off for Inter TV post-match interviews.

Apologised for actions

Mourinho reportedly jumped off the bus and energetically, if not to say rudely, asked Ramazzotti to remove himself. Thereafter, for the next few days, we had the "Caso Mourinho-Ramazzotti" which prompted a lot of ink to flow until such time as Mourinho apologised for his actions. Before he delivered his apology, however, he had time to joke that until now there had been only one "famous" Ramazzotti in Italy (namely the singer Eros Ramazzotti), yet now there was a second one. In the meantime, less attention was paid to a (relatively minor) Inter setback.

Football commentators long ago realised that Mourinho regularly uses the media to deflect criticism or attention from his players. In that sense, it was gratifying to hear Milito, one of this season's new boys, admit as much in a recent *Gazzetta Dello Sport* interview, revealing: "There is no coach like him when it comes to sticking his neck out and defending everyone, that way reducing the tension within the team when things aren't going well. It's no fluke that after a defeat, Inter gets straight back on its feet. That's all thanks to Mourinho."

Hard-fought...Inter's defeat of Rubin Kazan showed "personality"

> **"Run-ins with Ranieri or Ancelotti or whoever serve to take the heat off Mourinho's players"**

Mourinho himself explained the phenomenon in that RAI Christmas interview, saying: "Look, I have a problem, something which for some is a strong point and for others is a weakness. When I have to defend my players, I don't worry about myself or my image. I am willing to do anything to defend my club and my staff. Their affection and their respect are the things that really matter to me."

Rows with journalists and fellow coaches are one thing, but the continuing apparent Mourinho "love story" with English football is another. There is little doubt that many Inter fans viewed Mourinho's expressions of affection for English football during his visit to Stamford Bridge as further proof that he really does not like Italy or Italian football. Sooner,

MOVERS AND SHAKERS The key figures at Inter

MASSIMO MORATTI
Club president and principal shareholder. Billionaire whose wealth derives from the Saras oil company.

JOSE MOURINHO
Portuguese hired in 2008. The highest-paid club coach in world football, with an annual deal worth £10million.

MARCO BRANCA
Technical director. Former Inter striker who is now in charge of transfer policy.

GABRIELE ORIALI
Former Italy international and 1982 World Cup winner, now a club director who plays a key role in maintaining relations between the club and the players.

ANDREA BUTTI
Former press officer who now acts as "team manager" and is often at Mourinho's side on the bench.

BEPPE BARESI
The former Inter and Italy defender is now the club's assistant coach, acting as a link between Mourinho and the club's traditions. Brother of former Milan defender Franco Baresi.

ERNESTO PAOLILLO
Inter's managing director plays a purely administrative role, with Moratti holding all the power.

JAVIER ZANETTI
Hugely experienced club captain who is closing in on Giuseppe Bergomi's club record of 519 Serie A appearances. Holds strong political views and is heavily involved in charity work with Argentina's poor.

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rather than later, he will be packing his bags and heading back to the Premier League, they concluded.

Football professionals see things differently. Former Italy international Tarcisio Burgnich says that Mourinho is a "natural agent provocateur" who amuses himself by sowing doubts.

Former Italy international and Inter player Roberto Boninsegna says: "I would be really surprised if he left the club ahead of time. I don't see any reason why things would have to work out that way."

Seriousness and success

Another former Inter and Italy player, Alessandro Altobelli, while acknowledging the "seriousness and success" of Mourinho's work, tends to mirror the view of some Inter fans when he says: "Mourinho likes nothing about Italy."

Such was the (misconstrued) perception of a Mourinho love story with England that when the coach met the media on the eve of the Chievo game in January, he felt it necessary to explain himself, saying: "For the last time, I will explain this story.

"Yes, I love English football and the idea of going back to live in England. I want to go back but I have no idea when that will be and, anyway, I would never leave a job half-finished. I have a contract that runs through to 2012 [worth a reported £10million per annum]. After that, who knows what will happen. I could stay here, I could go to Japan, I could go to Riyadh. I could go anywhere and maybe I would not return to England immediately.

"However, one day I will go back to England, that's 100 per cent certain. I just don't know when. I feel good here, I have a contract that runs to 2012. When I signed for Inter, I certainly did not do it with the idea of leaving three months later."

Throughout his career, be it with Porto, Chelsea or Inter, Mourinho has given the impression that the one thing he likes is winning, impressively or otherwise.

When he speaks of his "honest" contract with Inter (in an interview with Portuguese daily *Publico*), the message is clear: we will be giving our best shot to bringing home the one trophy that Inter and Moratti most covet, namely the Champions League.

Yet this is clearly no small ask. In an Italian league that saw 10 Serie A coaches sacked before the new year, patience is not always the club owners' forte. Defeat by Chelsea could definitively upset the best-laid plans and lead to an earlier than anticipated parting of the ways. To put it mildly, the pressure is on. ●

GOALKEEPERS

1 Francesco TOLDO

Born 02.12.71

Was one of the world's leading keepers when he joined Inter from Fiorentina in 2001 but has played second fiddle to Julio Cesar since 2005. Italy's first choice keeper at Euro 2000.

12 Julio CESAR

05.09.79

One of the world's outstanding keepers, he succeeded Dida as Brazil's no1 in 2007. Began with Flamengo and joined Inter in 2005.

21 Paolo ORLANDONI

12.08.72

Much-travelled third-choice who has only played a handful of games since joining from Piacenza in 2005.

DEFENDERS

2 Ivan CORDOBA

11.08.76

Experienced Colombian centre-back who is not the tallest of defenders but has excellent positional sense and man-marking skills. Can also play at full-back. Joined from Argentina's San Lorenzo in 2000.

4 Javier ZANETTI

10.08.73

Club captain with more than 480 Serie A appearances for Inter since joining from Banfield in 1995, making him the league's most experienced foreign star. Also Argentina's most capped player with 136 caps. A right-back for most of his career, he has been used as a midfielder since the arrival of Mancini.

6 LUCIO

08.05.78

Brazil's national team captain and a centre-back who loves to break forward. Joined from Bayern Munich last summer. An evangelical Christian who wears a "Jesus loves you" T-shirt under his shirt on matchdays.

MIDFIELDERS

5 Dejan STANKOVIC

11.09.78

Inter's key playmaker, an attacking midfielder who joined from Lazio in January 2004. Excellent passer and scorer of spectacular goals. Captain of Serbia's national team.

7 Ricardo QUARESMA

26.09.83

Portugal winger who has not recovered his Porto form in Italy. Rumoured to have been the choice of Inter president Massimo Moratti rather than Jose Mourinho. Spent six months on loan at Chelsea last season.

8 Thiago MOTTA

28.08.82

Powerful but injury-prone Brazilian who rebuilt his career in Italy at Genoa after a difficult time at Atletico Madrid following a summer 2007 move from Barcelona. Joined Inter last summer.

FORWARDS

9 Samuel ETO'O

10.03.81

Cameroon international who moved to Inter last summer as the major player in the deal that took Zlatan Ibrahimovic to Barcelona. Twice a European Cup winner with Barcelona, becoming only the second player to have scored in two Finals.

22 Diego MILITO

12.06.79

Argentinian who joined from Genoa last summer in a £22m deal. A consistently prolific goalscorer with Genoa, Zaragoza and his first club, Racing of Buenos Aires. Brother of Barcelona defender Gabriel.

27 Goran PANDEV

27.07.83

Macedonian striker signed in controversial circumstances in early January (see Headliners, page 19).

Jose Mourinho's Internazionale squad

COACH

Jose MOURINHO

26.01.63

Won the Champions League and UEFA Cup with Porto before taking over at Chelsea, where he secured back-to-back Premier League titles. Won Serie A in his first season at Inter.

13 MAICON

26.07.81

Arguably the best attacking right-back in the world, he has established himself ahead of Dani Alves as Brazil's first-choice. Joined from Monaco in 2006.

23 Marco MATERAZZI

19.08.73

Centre-back with a troublesome reputation thanks to his clash with Zinedine Zidane at the 2006 World Cup Final. Joined Inter from Perugia in 2001, having spent a season at Everton early in his career. Signed a new three-year contract last summer but no longer first choice.

25 Walter SAMUEL

22.03.78

Argentinian centre-back nicknamed "The Wall" for his defensive solidity. Joined Inter in 2005 after a season at Real Madrid, having previously been a fixture in Italy with Roma.

26 Cristian CHIVU

26.10.80

Versatile Romanian who joined from Roma in 2007 having emerged as a teenage full-back at Ajax. Fractured his skull against Chievo in January and is expected to miss the rest of the season.

39 Davide SANTON

02.01.91

Young left-back who emerged last season but suffered a knee injury playing for Italy's Under-21 side in November.

10 Wesley SNEIJDER

09.06.84.

Holland international who joined from Real Madrid last summer following the transfers of Kaka and Cristiano Ronaldo to the Spanish capital. A highly rated youngster at Ajax, he moved to Madrid in 2007 for £24million; Inter paid £12m for him.

11 Sulley MUNTARI

27.08.84

Ghana international who made his name at Udinese before spending a season at Portsmouth. Returned to Italy in 2008 after Inter paid around £13m for him. A practising Muslim, he was criticised by Mourinho for lowering his energy levels by fasting during Ramadan.

15 Rene KRHIN

21.05.90

Slovenia international signed from Maribor as a 16-year-old and now on the fringes of the first-team squad.

19 Esteban CAMBIASSO

18.08.80

Intelligent Argentinian who plays a crucial role in defensive midfield but also capable of playing a more creative role. Joined from Real Madrid in 2004. Has not played for Argentina since Diego Maradona became coach.

30 MANCINI

01.08.80

Brazilian winger who made his mark at Roma but has failed to impress since a 2008 move to Milan.

45 Mario BALOTELLI

12.08.90

One of the most talked-about strikers in Italian football after he became the subject of widespread racist taunting by rival fans. Born in Sicily to Ghanaian immigrants but raised by an adoptive family in Brescia. Signed by Inter as a 16-year old from lower-division Lumezzane in 2006.

89 Marko ARNAUTOVIC

19.04.89

Highly rated Austrian winger signed on loan from Holland's Twente with a view to a permanent deal but has yet to make his mark.

Summer signing...Milito joined from Genoa at the start of the season

50 MANAGERS WHO

In the first of a series of features to celebrate *World Soccer*'s 50th anniversary,

CARLO ANCELOTTI

The current Chelsea manager was twice a winner of the European Cup, with Milan in 2003 and 2007, adding to his victories as a player with the club in 1989 and 1990.

"I have been lucky to work with clubs that gave me time, such as Parma, Juventus and Milan," Ancelotti told *World Soccer* in November 2007. "But then the results help, too."

ALBERT BATTEUX

The most successful coach in the history of the French league, he won nine Ligue 1 titles with Reims and St Etienne. Batteux also took Reims to two European Cup Finals, including the competition's first in 1956, and coached France to third place at the 1958 World Cup.

"The British don't pay enough attention to the analysis of game situations," Batteux told *World Soccer* in November 1969. "The result is that the players don't understand and can't anticipate what will happen next. So they wait and see where the ball goes and then rush to fight it!"

British players have assets but they lack organization

ENZO BEARZOT

The man who masterminded Italy's 1982 World Cup triumph following a switch to a more expansive style of play. "There are fashions in football," he told *World Soccer* in December 1977. "Catenaccio is not this year's model and will never come back again."

FRANZ: I'D RESIGN

FRANZ BECKENBAUER

The only man to have won the World Cup as team captain and coach, in 1974 and 1990. Took West Germany to the 1986 and 1990 World Cup Finals before brief spells in charge of Marseille and Bayern Munich.

"We now have a young and highly promising team," Beckenbauer told *World Soccer* in March 1990 ahead of the World Cup. "During the European Championships we fielded a side with an average age of 24.5 – much too young for a national team. The best average is about 27 when the players have more experience."

> "For me, the team which has only one style is no good"
>
> *Carlos Bilardo*

RAFAEL BENITEZ

A Spanish league winner with Valencia and Champions League winner with Liverpool. Injury ended his playing ambitions while still in his 20s, but he overcame early coaching setbacks to gain promotion with Tenerife before moving on to Valencia.

"You are almost always going to face criticism, so you need to make sure everyone knows their place and then you can lay down the rules," Benitez told *World Soccer* in February 2003. "Little by little the players will recognise that what they are doing is worthwhile and that is when you gain in authority as a coach."

CARLOS BILARDO

A key figure in the Estudiantes side of the 1960s who went on to become coach of Argentina's 1986 World Cup-winning side. The arch pragmatist – in stark contrast to the romanticism of 1978 winner Cesar Luis Menotti.

"For me, the team which has only one style is no good," he told *World Soccer* in June 1985. "They have to know how to do zonal marking, or with a stopper, or mixed marking, or play the offside trap. The player has to vary according to circumstance."

MATTERED

World Soccer Magazine 50 Years 1960 - 2010

we select the 50 most influential managers of the past 50 years

SIR MATT BUSBY

The Scot who single-handedly rebuilt Manchester United from the ruins of the Munich air disaster in 1958 and who cast a dominant shadow over Old Trafford until the arrival of Alex Ferguson in 1986.

FABIO CAPELLO

The former Italy international had very little experience when he succeeded Arrigo Sacchi as Milan coach in 1991, but he took the team to new heights, culminating in the 4-0 defeat of Barcelona in the 1994 European Cup Final. Went on to win league titles with Juventus, Roma and Real Madrid, making a total of nine championships in 16 years. A cultured man off the pitch – he has an impressive collection of modern art – but adopts a disciplinarian approach to football management.

LUIS CARNIGLIA

Technically, his greatest achievements, winning the 1958 and 1959 European Cups with Real Madrid, pre-date 1960, but his influence extended way into the 1960s, when he took charge of Milan in their 1963 Intercontinental Cup encounter with Pele's Santos.

BRIAN CLOUGH

Brash and big-headed but brilliant, a winner of back-to-back European Cup Finals with Nottingham Forest in 1979 and 1980. "I have always shown far too much emotion in football," Clough told *World Soccer* in February 1975. "I was too emotionally involved with the players and that type of thing but of course they were very special players and I was delighted to have that relationship."

> "I have always shown far too much emotion in football"
>
> *Brian Clough*

JOHAN CRUYFF

One of the world's greatest players became the first Barcelona coach to win the European Cup, in 1992, and also claimed four consecutive Spanish titles with the "Dream Team". "I have my own particular ideas about football and how it should be run," Cruyff told *World Soccer* in April 1992. "I also have a particular expertise on the subject because football is my profession and my life. Club presidents are lawyers, bankers, businessmen and experts in their own spheres. But I don't believe any of them have anything to teach me about the game."

KENNY DALGLISH

The most successful player-manager of all-time, guiding Liverpool to the 1986 league and Cup double, but quit in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster.

VICENTE FEOLA

Turned Brazil from superstitious World Cup losers into winners for the first time in 1958. Was the man who unleased Pele and Garrincha on the global game.

ALEX FERGUSON

Will he ever stop? Manchester United's longest-serving boss and British football's most decorated manager, having won three Scottish titles, 11 English championships, two European Cups and two Cup-winners Cups.

RAYMOND GOETHALS

For years the dominant Belgian coach with Anderlecht and Standard Liege, and then a controversial Champions Cup winner with Marseille in 1993 – at the "record age" of 71.

BELA GUTTMANN

Pioneering Hungarian who gave Eusebio his debut at Benfica and then guided a Eusebio-inspired Benfica side to the 1961 and 1962 European Cups. Unusually for a European coach, he also worked in South America, at Sao Paulo and Penarol.

ERNST HAPPEL

The Austrian, who died in 1992, was one of the most successful coaches of all time. Having won league titles in four different countries (Holland, Belgium, Germany and Austria), he led Holland to the 1978 World Cup Final and won the European Cup with unfancied Feyenoord and Hamburg.

SEPP HERBERGER

Germany's national coach until 1964, he masterminded the "Miracle of Bern" in 1954 but his influence extended way into the 1960s and 1970s as he laid the foundations for professional coaches such as Helmut Schoen to flourish.

> "In the West, young players can be rather stubborn. That can be a good quality, but mostly it is negative"
>
> *Guus Hiddink*

HELENIO HERRERA

The ultimate cosmopolitan coach: born in Morocco, brought up in Argentina, then an international for France before becoming a trendsetting coach in Spain, Portugal and Italy. Known as "HH", his unique mixture of tactical discipline and team-bonding techniques prompted infamous fall-outs with great players such as Ladislav Kubala at Barcelona and Antonio Valentin Angelillo at Inter. His perfection of catenaccio was balanced by the "creation" of stars such as Luis Suarez, Giacinto Facchetti and Sandro Mazzola. Led Inter to European and world domination in the mid-1960s.

GUUS HIDDINK

Much-travelled Dutchman who has specialised of late in helping middle-ranking nations to punch above their weight. Proved his adaptability by steering Chelsea to FA Cup success last season.

"In the West, especially in Holland, young players can be rather stubborn. That can be a good quality, but mostly it is negative," Hiddink told *World Soccer* in May 2002.

OTTMAR HITZFELD

Along with Ernst Happel, the current Switzerland manager is the only man to have won the European Cup with two different clubs: Borussia Dortmund in 1997 and Bayern Munich in 2001.

AIME JACQUET

Coach of France's 1998 World Cup-winning side who defied intense media criticism to triumph with *Les Bleus*. Won three French league titles with Bordeaux in the 1980s before becoming assistant to national team coach Gerard Houllier, succeeding him in 1994.

UDO LATTEK

One of Germany's most successful coaches who, along with Giovanni Trapattoni, is the only man to have won all three major European club titles – and the only one to do so with three different teams: Bayern Munich (1974 European Cup), Monchengladbach (1979 UEFA Cup) and Barcelona (1982 Cup-winners Cup). Won three more league titles with Bayern in the 1980s. "If a player talks out of turn, he's out of the team," he told *World Soccer* in January 1983. "It's as simple as that. I have to maintain my authority."

MARCELLO LIPPI

Italy's 2006 World Cup-winning coach also has a strong pedigree, having won the 1996 European Cup and five Italian league titles in two spells with Juventus. "Being sacked is not only part of a coach's job but also it is useful because it lets you unwind, chill out," he told *World Soccer* in April 2007. "It gives you time to travel, to look at different things to improve yourself. It's a good thing to have six months off every now and again."

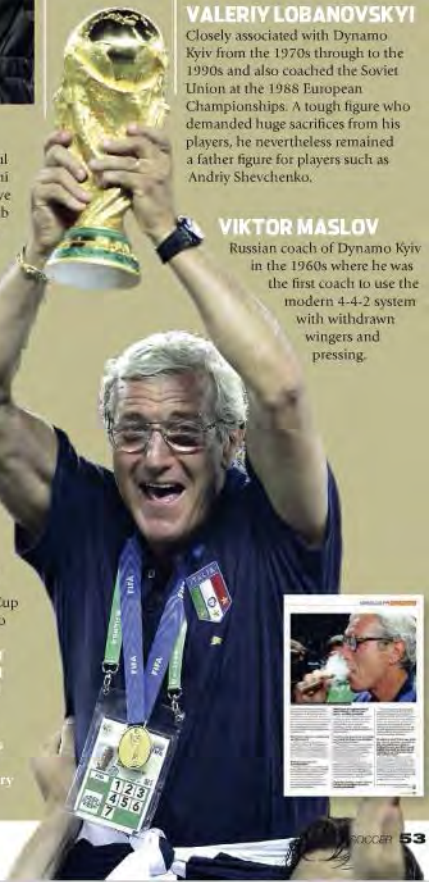
> "Being sacked is not only part of a coach's job, it lets you unwind"
>
> *Marcello Lippi*

VALERIY LOBANOVSKYI

Closely associated with Dynamo Kyiv from the 1970s through to the 1990s and also coached the Soviet Union at the 1988 European Championships. A tough figure who demanded huge sacrifices from his players, he nevertheless remained a father figure for players such as Andriy Shevchenko.

VIKTOR MASLOV

Russian coach of Dynamo Kyiv in the 1960s where he was the first coach to use the modern 4-4-2 system with withdrawn wingers and pressing.



CESAR LUIS MENOTTI

"*El Flaco*" (the thin man) won little as a manager, but his 1978 World Cup victory with Argentina established his reputation and mystique throughout the Spanish-speaking football world. Menotti's achievement was in leading Argentinian football out of a cynically ruthless era that was typified by Independiente and, especially, Estudiantes de La Plata. His preference for a more positive style provided a national team showcase for the likes of Mario Kempes and Osvaldo Ardiles. Menotti's almost philosophical stance put him at odds with other powerful coaches, such as Juan Carlos Lorenzo and Carlos Bilardo. Nor was it successful when Menotti tried to translate it into the Spanish club world with Barcelona and Atletico Madrid.

"I continue to favour individual talent even though the less-talented player is always more ready to rely on team work," Menotti (below) told *World Soccer* in October 1979.

> "I favour individual talent even though the less-talented player is more ready to rely on team work"
>
> *Cesar Luis Menotti*

RINUS MICHELS

The Holland and Ajax centre-forward achieved far greater fame as a coach in the late 1960s and 1970s. Labelled the "father of total football", his team of super-fit and technically talented individuals interchanged positions at will under the on-pitch leadership of the young Johan Cruyff. Ajax won three Champions Cups in a row in the early 1970s, though Michels managed only the first success before heading off to Barcelona. He guided Holland to the 1974 World Cup Final and to victory in the 1988 European Championship.

"The players think that because they have a natural gift for the game that football can become a well-paid hobby," Michels told *World Soccer* in December 1981. "I have to persuade them that they must earn their big money by working to improve their all-round ability."

MILJAN MILJANIC

Coach of Red Star Belgrade and Real Madrid who took charge of Yugoslavia at the 1974 and 1982 World Cups and went on to wield huge influence as the president of the Football Association of Yugoslavia.

JOSE MOURINHO

Assured of his place in history thanks to European Cup and UEFA Cup victories with Porto, and league titles in England and Italy. Another European Cup triumph with Inter would confirm his special status.

"I don't think I'm arrogant," Mourinho told *World Soccer* in December 2004. "I'm not here to be what you want me to be. I didn't go there to be part of your movie."

MIGUEL MUNOZ

The first man to win the European Cup as a player and manager. Won the trophy three times while in charge of Real Madrid in a 14-year spell that made him the club's longest-serving coach. Also led Spain at the 1982 and 1986 World Cups.

BOB PAISLEY

The most successful British manager in European club competition, having guided Liverpool to three European Cups (1977, 1978 and 1981) and the UEFA Cup.

CARLOS ALBERTO PARREIRA

Brazil's 1994 World Cup-winning coach has been in charge of four different teams at World Cups finals: Kuwait (1982), UAE (1990), Brazil (1994 and 2006), Saudi Arabia (1998) and is set to oversee a fifth, South Africa, in 2010.

SIR ALF RAMSEY

Became England's first manager with sole responsibility for team selection in 1963 and his "wingless wonders" triumphed at Wembley in 1966. A pragmatic tactician, he struggled for a role in football after being sacked following failure to qualify for the 1974 World Cup but retained public affection until his death in 1999.

OTTO REHHAGEL

The mastermind behind Greece's Euro 2004 triumph which relied on defensive tactics and hard running. Ironically, the German had gained a reputation for attacking football during a 14-year spell at Werder Bremen, where he oversaw several second-place Bundesliga finishes. Had an unsuccessful spell at Bayern Munich before taking Kaiserslautern from the second division to the league title in successive seasons.

"There's no such thing as a young or old coach," he told *World Soccer* in June 2004. "Just successful ones and not-so-successful ones."

BOBBY ROBSON

The most successful British manager of the modern era in terms of titles won across Europe. After an eight-year period as England manager ended when his side lost in the semi-finals of the 1990 World Cup, Robson took on a series of coaching challenges across Europe, and won trophies in Portugal, Holland and Spain.

"What I like about coaching in countries like Spain and Portugal is that you're not involved in the complete running of the club," Robson told *World Soccer* in October 1996. "In England you do everything, the whole works. At Barcelona, I'll just be handling the team."

> "There is no such thing as 'Total Football'. It's a phrase invented by pseudo experts"
>
> *Helmut Schoen*

Passion for life
F.C.B.

ALMOST READY

NEREO ROCCO

Italian who guided Milan to success in the 1963 and 1969 European Cup Finals and 1967 European Cup-winners Cup but, more significantly, he developed the catenaccio system with his home-town club Triestina in the 1950s.

ARRIGO SACCHI

The coach who proved that being a successful professional footballer is not essential for management. Sacchi was nothing as a player and only came to Milan's attention when his Monza side emerged from Serie B to spring an Italian Cup shock. Milan's new owner, Silvio Berlusconi, made perhaps his finest appointment in bringing Sacchi on board. He found a shape, style and tactic which brought instant success for his perfectly-matched mix of star Dutch and Italian internationals. Later proved his club success was no accident by leading the *Azzurri* to the 1994 World Cup Final.

"Twenty years ago all our football was based on fear of the opposition and how to stop them," Sacchi told *World Soccer* in September 1992. "Some teams still play that way, but now we have teams who want to entertain the supporters by winning with skilful, attacking play."

TELE SANTANA

Coach of Brazil at the 1982 and 1986 World Cups, when they were praised for their attacking football but failed to win the trophy. Went on to enjoy success with a similarly attacking strategy at Sao Paulo, winning the Libertadores Cup and World Club Cup.

"In Brazil, the way you win doesn't matter," he told *World Soccer* in June 1989. "I'm a bit different. I don't want to win anyhow and I don't want the referee to help me. They talk a lot about us losing the World Cup, for example. But I left satisfied because Brazil were recognised as the best team in the World Cup by everyone."

HELMUT SCHOEN

The only national coach to have won the European Championships and World Cup, having triumphed with West Germany in 1972 and 1974.

"There is no such thing as 'Total Football'," he told *World Soccer* in April 1975. "It's just a phrase invented by pseudo experts. Of course we want all-rounders, and a system in which players can express themselves. But there will never be a team with 10 players constantly changing their roles within the framework of the general pattern. We must have specialists as well. Would you play a goal poacher like Gerd Muller at full-back?"

SLOVENIA
Robert Koren

The Slovenian skipper is his team's most creative operator

THE CAPTAINCY of Slovenia has been the making of the West Bromwich Albion midfielder.

Before national coach Matjaz Kek appointed him skipper at the start of the World Cup qualifying campaign, Koren's first five years as an international were average at best, a period in which his undoubted creativity and flair were showcased only intermittently and he seemed weighed down by his billing as the hand-picked successor to Zlatko Zahovic, the star of the Slovenia team which reached the finals of Euro 2000 and World Cup 2002.

But, as is often the case, the donning of the armband, offered Koren fresh impetus at this level and the new responsibilities have added more drive and purpose to his game.

While Kek has received praise for the way he has moulded a group of no-name individuals into a finely tuned collective unit – one which conceded only four goals in qualifying and then upset the odds in the play-offs by beating Russia – Koren has played his part in the process too.

Calm under pressure, always active in the centre of the park and comfortable leading from the front, he embodies the fearless spirit of the side.

No matter if Slovenia has a population of just two million and just 30,000 registered players. Faith, according to Koren and company, can move mountains.

"Koren has done a fine job as the general on the pitch," says former Slovenia coach Bojan Prasnikar. "From his first game as captain [the 1-1 draw in Wroclaw against Poland] it was clear that the rest of the team were responding to his leadership.

"He's been around the national team for a long time, has earned his spurs in English football and everyone respects him. We have a young, mostly inexperienced squad, so it's vital to have someone of his stature and personality in a key role on the pitch.

"It's not been easy for Koren. For a long while he had to deal with all the talk that he was the 'new Zahovic'. That was unfair. There was no one better than Zahovic in breaking into goalscoring positions and making finishing look easy. Koren, on the other hand, is more the creative type, someone with lots of skill and acceleration.

"At long last Robert is accepted on his own terms."

Since his full debut against Cyprus in 2003, he has scored just four goals in 44 appearances and even though he played with style and effectiveness on the road to the finals, he only managed two goals, both in the 5-0 home win against San Marino. South Africa this summer would be the ideal location for him to turn over a new leaf but no one is holding their breath down Maribor way.

Koren, who joined West Brom from Norwegian outfit Lillestrom in January 2007, is one of only four Slovenians to have played in the Premier League and certainly will not need to thumb through a scouting report prior to his country's World Cup showdown with England in Port Elizabeth.

"Because of their tradition, their many brilliant players and Fabio Capello as coach, England have to be the favourites to win the group," says the 29-year-old. "But if they think the game with us is already won, they will be making a mistake.

"Our recent loss in a friendly at Wembley will count for next to nothing. We were more focused on our next match, the qualifier at home to Poland.

"It suits us to be the outsiders. We were expected to lie down before Russia and we know what happened then. Heart, character and togetherness can take you a long way. We will not have the advantage of playing at home, which recently has become a real fortress for us, but I'm sure we can adjust to the African conditions."

At the World Cup finals of 2002, a bust-up between Zahovic and coach Srecko Katanec resulted in a dramatic loss of Slovenian morale and a pointless early exit. With Kek and Koren at the controls, a similar disintegration is unimaginable.

Nick Bidwell

> **"Calm under pressure, he embodies the fearless spirit of the side"**

Upset...Koren celebrates beating Russia in the play-offs

URUGUAY
Diego Perez

Third time lucky for *la Celeste*'s midfield motivator

There at last...Perez hopes to make up for missing out on the past two World Cups

ACCORDING TO Diego Perez, during the World Cup qualifiers Uruguay "had the calculator in our hand right to the last – it's been like that ever since I've been part of the national team".

In the last three campaigns *la Celeste* have had to settle for the play-off place: against Australia in 2001 and 2005, and Costa Rica this time. And Perez is the only player who has been in the squad for all three.

If captain Diego Lugano leads from the back, and Diego Forlan is the senior striker, the third Diego in the middle may be less glamorous, but no less important.

With a place in South Africa assured, Uruguay's leading newspaper, *El Pais*, commented that "the symbol of the side's fighting spirit is Perez. He runs for every ball, shouts, organises, wins possession, passes and goes up to join the attack."

While 48 internationals without a goal would indicate an over-estimation of his attacking contribution, everything else is accurate. The central midfielder balances out the side with his spirit of sacrifice and simplicity.

As is so often the case in Uruguay, he is from a football family and his older brother, Omar Perez, plays for Castellon in the Spanish second division.

Diego himself came through the ranks at Defensor Sporting and had a brief spell with Penarol before joining Monaco in 2004, where the unusual atmosphere of football in the millionaire's playground may explain why internationals are the main event for him.

"With my club we play for important and difficult things, but it doesn't compare with the national team," he says. "With Uruguay when we've scored important goals I've felt a powerful emotion that doesn't happen with Monaco.

"That's why there's so much pressure and anxiety involved with the national team, for everything you feel for the country where you were born and for the intensity with which the people experience football."

Perez made his international debut in 2001 as part of an experimental side that finished fourth in the Copa America. Clearly at home at that level, he was drafted into the full-strength squad for the final few World Cup qualifiers. He made a couple of substitute appearances and was on duty, though he did not come on, in the play-off against Australia which Uruguay won 3-1 on aggregate. He featured in some of the World Cup warm-up friendlies, but was then cut from the squad for the 2002 finals.

"There's so much pressure and anxiety with the national team"

In 2005 he played in the home leg against the Australians, but was replaced by an extra defender in the return as his team missed out on a trip to Germany 2006 on penalties.

This time around there was no doubt. Ever since Oscar Tabarez took over for his second spell in charge, Perez has been a fixture in the starting line up. Of the 20 qualification games, he played 14, only missing out through injury or suspension.

"I've never been to a World Cup and I dream about being there," says the 29-year-old.

That dream is just a few months away from coming true.

Tim Vickery

LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI

Brazil's 2002 World Cup-winning coach who earned notoriety as a tough-guy manager at Gremio and Palmeiras in the 1990s, winning the Libertadores Cup with both before heeding the call from the national side. Rescued a struggling qualifying campaign and built a side around the goalscoring talents of a reborn Ronaldo.

"If we have to play ugly to reach the objective, we will play ugly," he told *World Soccer* in May 2002. "The national team should be like a family. Everybody has to get on with everybody else and be prepared to save everyone else."

BILL SHANKLY

The sharp-tongued Scot who laid the foundations for the modern Liverpool, creating the "boot room" and a generation of domestic and European success.

> "If we have to play ugly to reach the objective, we will play ugly"
>
> *Luiz Felipe Scolari*

JOCK STEIN

The ground-breaking Scottish manager who oversaw Celtic's record run of nine consecutive league titles, as well as their historic triumph in the 1967 European Cup.

GUY THYS

Long-serving coach of the Belgium national side whose spells in charge spanned three decades and included fourth place at the 1986 World Cup and runners-up spot at the 1980 European Championship.

GIOVANNI TRAPATTONI

The only manager to have won all three European club competitions and the World Club Cup – all with Juventus, during two spells with the Turin club. Also won the Italian league with Internazionale and titles in Portugal and Austria.

LOUIS VAN GAAL

Dutchman who won the 1995 European Cup with an exciting young Ajax side before a high-profile move to Barcelona, where he won two Spanish titles, followed by a less successful stint in charge of Holland.

JOSE VILLALONGA

The youngest manager to lift the European Cup, at 36 years and 185 days old, when Real Madrid won the first Final in 1956. Went on to coach Atletico Madrid, winning the 1962 European Cup-winners Cup before guiding Spain to success at the 1964 European Championship.

> "Nowadays the star is the team. Players who cannot adapt to that will get left behind"
>
> *Arsene Wenger*

MARIO ZAGALLO

The first man to be involved in four World Cup triumphs. A winning player in 1958 and 1962, he harnessed the talents of senior players, including Pele, as coach of the triumphant 1970 side in Mexico. Was assistant coach when Carlos Alberto Parreira won in 1994. Also coach again at 1998 finals.

OSVALDO ZUBELDIA

Argentinian boss of the 1960s Estudiantes side that gained notoriety for their physical win-at-all-costs approach, particularly in World Club Cup encounters with Celtic, Manchester United, Feyenoord and Milan.

ARSENE WENGER

The "professor" who revolutionised English clubs' attitude to diet and fitness, and opened eyes to scouting and overseas youth development. "Nowadays the star is the team," he told *World Soccer* in September 1996. "The players who cannot adapt to that will get left behind."

SOUTH KOREA
Park Chu-young

Monaco striker keen to make up for disappointment of 2006

Leading man...Park has made a name for himself in Ligue 1

ACADEMICALLY outstanding during his schooldays in the South Korean city of Daegu – so much so his parents were initially unwilling to allow him to make a career in football – Monaco striker Park will be resitting his World Cup exams this year.

After an explosive, goal-studded start to his career with South Korea Under-20s and Seoul, as well as being voted Asian Young Player of the Year for 2004, he was widely expected to continue on the high road at the 2006 World Cup finals but achieved little in Germany, sat on the bench for Korea's opening two games and looking out of his depth in his team's third – a 2-0 loss to Switzerland.

So much for the media hype, the "Asian Baggio" label and the screams of his teenage female fans. On the biggest stage of all, he had been found wanting.

The wounds have long since healed, though, and the chances of him setting his World Cup record straight in South Africa are, to say the least, excellent.

At 24, he is older and wiser and now fully established in the South Korea side, scoring four times in the 2010 qualifiers – including one in the 2-0 win in Saudi Arabia in November, his nation's first victory over the Saudis for 19 years.

South Korea boss Huh Jung-moo, who is about to lead the Taeguk Warriors into their seventh successive World Cup finals, can take great heart from the exceptional strike force that he has at his disposal with the opportunism in the box of Lee Keun-ho of J.League side Jubilo Iwata and the all-action, live-wire style of Park. The pair work superbly together as Lee keeps the opposition centre-backs occupied, while the fast, skilful and industrious Park flits left, right and deep.

It is precisely this capacity for non-stop movement and palpable desire which have made him such a popular figure in France over the last 18 months.

The day Park was unveiled at Monaco following a £2m move from Seoul, a large proportion of the journalists present would have sworn on the spot that the deal had more to do with Asian marketing rights than talent. But such a jaundiced view would not hold water for long; Park scoring one and making another on his debut against Lorient and generally enjoying a brilliant inaugural season in Europe.

No wonder Monaco were so keen for him to sign a contract extension, tying him to the club until 2013. "He's one of the most willing and generous players you will ever come across," says Monaco coach Guy Lacombe. "When he plays he always gives the impression that he's dying to have the ball."

Park, who was so determined to be a footballer that he spent a year as a teenager at Zico's academy in Rio de Janeiro, does, however, come with a fault line: a tendency for injury. Thus far, his career development has been arrested by a complicated stress fracture of his right foot, plus thigh and hamstring problems. Another medical bulletin is the last thing Huh Jung-moo will want to see in his in-tray in the coming months.

> **"The chances of him setting the record straight are excellent"**

Nick Bidwell

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GREECE

Theofanis Gekas

On the fringes for his club, but main man for his country

IN normal circumstances, prolific international marksmen do not find themselves unwelcome at their clubs.

Hence the barely concealed frustration of Greece striker Theofanis Gekas who, in spite of scoring 10 times during World Cup qualification (more than anyone else in Europe), was deemed surplus to requirements at Bundesliga pace-setters Bayer Leverkusen and opted to join Hertha Berlin for the second half of the season in their battle against relegation.

"It has been damaging to my morale to always be on the bench at Leverkusen," says the 29-year-old, who starred in Greek football with Larissa, Kallithea and Panathinaikos before moving to Germany in 2006 to join Bochum.

"The bright side, though, is that I've been raring to go when picked for my country. I've energy to burn and every time I step onto the pitch my only aim is to live up to the faith coach Otto Rehhagel has shown in me. He could have forgotten who I am."

Gekas has led a schizophrenic footballing existence for the best part of two years, gradually falling out of favour at Leverkusen after finishing the 2007-08 campaign as their top scorer and unable to make any impact during an ill-fated six-month loan spell in the Premier League with Portsmouth.

On returning to Bayer last summer, he made all the right noises about starting afresh. Unfortunately for him, no one told coach Jupp Heynckes.

Hellenic headliner or not, he would have to make do with the lot of the misunderstood substitute: five minutes here, a quarter of an hour there. Crumbs from the table, indeed.

His face simply does not fit. Heynckes feels the little Greek offers next to nothing in the air at set-pieces, and Leverkusen team-mate Stefan Kiessling went public last year with the complaint that Gekas did not make enough runs and had to do more than just lurk close to goal.

Suffice to say, Gekas has many more admirers in both his homeland – and at Bochum, where his 20 goals in 2006-07 made him the Bundesliga's leading scorer.

A front runner of multiple faces, the gutsy Gekas is a master at latching onto chances in a crowded box, is lightning quick, a powerful counter-attacker and, contrary to the Kiessling viewpoint, is highly mobile.

"I have been raring to go when picked for my country"

Although sceptics will point to the fact that a half-dozen of his World Cup qualifying goals came against the less-than impregnable Latvia, his international strike rate of 20 goals in 45 games is nonetheless impressive. Responsible for over half of Greece's goals in the last 18 months, he has become the indispensable cutting edge of a Rehhagel blueprint which continues to emphasise substance over style.

Ex-Bochum boss Marcel Koller used to call Gekas his "life insurance". Greece and their coach, Rehhagel, have an identical policy.

Nick Bidwell

A decent run out...Gekas will be hoping for more playing time at Hertha

GOALSCORERS

Radamel FALCAO
PORTO

DORMANT Portuguese giants Benfica now have another reason to envy all-powerful domestic rivals Porto. Last summer the Lisbon side were convinced they had persuaded Colombian marksman Falcao to join them from River Plate, only for negotiations to break down at the 11th hour as Porto arrived on the scene and hijacked the deal, agreeing a £3.5million transfer fee and lucrative four-year contract for a 23-year-old dubbed "*El Tigre*" (the tiger).

Although he is named after the Brazil and Roma midfielder of the 1980s, this Falcao is not cut from the same stylish cloth. Dynamism, pace, intensity and emphatic finishing with head or foot are what he trades in – and though he was used at times in a withdrawn attacking role at River, there can be little doubt that the one-time student of journalism was born to make headlines leading the line.

In his first taste of the European game his goals and never-say-die spirit have already made him the darling of the Porto fans; so much so that his much-loved predecessor Lisandro Lopez – who left Portugal in August for Lyon – is now just a distant memory.

Kevin GAMEIRO
LORIENT

AS a schoolboy in the Picardy region of northern France, Kevin Gameiro was regularly told he was far too small to make it as a professional footballer, and the same reason was given when he was turned away by the national academy at Clairefontaine. But the young striker persevered and, after Strasbourg decided to take a chance on him as a 15-year-old in 2002, he has made it his life's work to demonstrate intelligence, speed and technique are as important as vital statistics.

A starlet at Strasbourg as well as for France Under-20s – who he helped win the 2007 Toulon festival by finishing as the tournament's top scorer and its most influential player – he has become even better since joining Breton outfit Lorient 18 months ago, improving his right-footed finishing and the quality of his off-the-ball runs. The vast majority of forwards have a streak of selfishness running through them, but Gameiro prefers a more altruistic approach and perhaps that is why Lorient insist they will not sell him for less than £10million. "We got lucky when we found him," smiles Lorient coach Christian Gourcuff.

Stefan KIESSLING
BAYER LEVERKUSEN

ON hearing the sad news that striker Patrick Helmes had ruptured knee ligaments in pre-season, many were quick to conclude that Leverkusen would struggle for firepower this term. How wrong they were. The 25-year-old Kiessling scored in each of the first five games of this campaign and, as his personal goal-counter continued to tick over nicely, Bayer moved smoothly into top spot and look as though they will take some dislodging.

Bought from Nurnberg back in the summer of 2006, Kiessling's goal spree has been the perfect response to all the critics who once lambasted him for being too awkward and too inclined to lose his cool in front of goal. Fortunately, neither applies today and the same scribes write only in praise of his dead-eye finishing, enthusiasm and ability to cover kilometre upon kilometre.

Kiessling recently won a recall to Germany's national squad and given his explosive current form and versatility – he can play through the middle, on either flank or in the "hole" – it will be a major surprise if he is not in South Africa this summer.

SIX OF THE BEST

Nick Bidwell profiles half a dozen of Europe's most prolific strikers this season

Alessandro MATRI
CAGLIARI

IN his dotage, Alessandro Matri's thoughts of the autumn and winter of 2009 are sure to bring a warm glow to his heart. On the score sheet week in and week out, he has not only emerged as the most reliable source of Cagliari goals since the great Gigi Riva wrought havoc with his left foot in the 1960s and 1970s, but he has also put himself in line for a call-up to Marcello Lippi's Italy squad.

His move to centre stage was one few saw coming. Up until this season, his third at Cagliari, the 25-year-old was known principally for his playboy lifestyle and a penchant for dating TV showgirls. Not any more. All of a sudden, he looks the complete no9: excellent in his hold-up play, physically resilient, strong in the air and with a habit of being in the right place at the right time.

A product of the Milan youth system, he served his time on loan in the lower leagues with Prato, Lumezzane and Rimini, before joining Cagliari in 2007. He claims to model his game on that of Chelsea and Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba and there is more than a passing resemblance.

Bryan RUIZ
TWENTE

TWENTE definitely made a copper-bottomed investment when they handed Belgian club Gent £5million for the fast-improving Costa Rican Bryan Ruiz, who is the doppelganger of Paraguay's Roque Santa Cruz.

Nominally stationed on the left side of a front three, but allowed freedom by coach Steve McClaren to burst into the opposition box at will, Ruiz has been gouging on goals this term, with his record of scoring in 10 consecutive Eredivisie games earlier this season making his side the team to beat. With Ruiz on one flank, on-loan Chelsea youngster Miroslav Stoch on the other and Blaise Nkufo charging through the middle, Twente ran riot.

Also comfortable in a creative midfield role, Ruiz came up through the youth ranks of Costa Rican top-flight side Alajuelense and became one of their leading lights as he helped them win the 2004 CONCACAF Champions Cup and the domestic title the following year. After moving to Gent, in 2006, his first season in Europe was a stop-start affair, but he soon made up for lost time, offering goals and no little Caribbean verve.

Roberto SOLDADO
GETAFE

VALENCIA-BORN Roberto Soldado declared at the start of this season that his aim was to perform well enough to secure a berth in Spain's World Cup squad. And he proved he was deadly serious by notching a hat-trick to help his team blitz Racing Santander on the opening day of La Liga.

Ultimately, a lack of consistency may thwart his hopes of establishing himself internationally, but on his day he can be truly unstoppable – as he proved with another treble, this time in a 5-1 win over Xerez.

On Real Madrid's books from the age of 14, he made his first-team debut for *Los Blancos* in October 2005 but, like so many home-grown Bernabeu fledglings, he was squeezed out in favour of the galacticos.

After a free-scoring loan spell at Osasuna in 2006-07, he returned to Real with high hopes. Yet once again found himself on the bench, and in the summer of 2008 he did what he had to do – move across Madrid to start regularly for Getafe. Thirteen league goals last term says he made the right choice.

Sergio Aguero

I know when I'm with the national team he [Maradona] is not my father-in-law but the coach... we talk about football in private, but about general things

Sergio Aguero

The Argentina youngster on his country's World Cup chances and his very famous father-in-law

Maradona, Messi & me

What do Argentina need to do to improve ahead of the World Cup?
I think the main problem is that we've had very few days training together. Normally we'd get together on a Tuesday and play on the Saturday, which doesn't give us time to do very much. Now, ahead of the World Cup, we will have plenty of time and we can work on various aspects, like combinations and how we use the ball. If we can make the most of that, with the players we have, we should do well. But I think the most important thing is that we need time.

One of the criticisms of the Argentina team is the height of the players. Some say that when you, Carlos Tevez and Lionel Messi play, the team is unable to impose itself in attack when a more physical game is needed. Is that so?
Not really. There are coaches who like a centre-forward; others prefer to play with two attackers out wide and someone in the hole. Each coach decides how he wants to do things. We know that in Argentina today, apart from Martin Palermo, who is a target man, the rest of us are of "normal" height [smiles] but Diego [Maradona] wants us to play the ball on the floor, to play with more mobility. Now we're also going to see Gonzalo Higuain and myself playing further up front. I think we have players to score lots of goals.

How do you handle your relationship with Diego Maradona, given that he's not just your national team coach but also your father-in-law?
Our relationship is really good. I know when I'm with the national team he is not my father-in-law but the coach. I think he knows that I respect him as a coach. Outside football he's my father-in-law and we act more like family. In the national team, though, I have to work in the same way I did with the previous coaches. Also, I don't want the other players to think I'm getting preferential treatment. Obviously we also talk about football in private, but about general things, not so much the national team.

Does that mean that when you and Maradona are together within the family you never speak about the Argentina national team?
Never.

Was that a rule that you agreed on from the start?
We never needed to agree a rule. Anything that he has to say about the national team, he says to the group. I don't talk to him about it in private.

So you never know in advance if you are going to be included in the squad for the next game?
No, not really. In any case, I live in Madrid, and he is in Buenos Aires, so we don't have much of a regular dialogue.

Moving on to Atletico Madrid, why do you think that, despite spending so much on new players in recent seasons, the club has not enjoyed any notable success and always seems to be in crisis?
That's nothing new. Things have always been like that at the club. In recent years, Atletico Madrid have been a team that is capable of winning five games on the trot and then losing the next four. It was the same before my arrival; the only difference is that now people say we have a world-class squad and we should win every game. But I do not think this is so. The Spanish league is very difficult and it also depends on the morale and confidence of the players. I think we're going through a bad patch, but if we can win three games on the bounce we will come out of it and move forward.

What do you feel are your own strengths and weaknesses? In which areas do you think you still have to improve?
You learn things every day. I have learned a lot but I still have a long way to go. For example, in my first year here I knew nothing about the Spanish league and [the then coach Javier] Aguirre took things slowly with me. If he had just thrown me in it wouldn't have worked very well because I didn't know that much. That really helped. I trained hard and he was able to teach me a lot. It's the same now with Quique [Sanchez Flores]; I'm learning a lot. As for individual things, they just come naturally and you know what you have to do – if you're under par or you're moving well; if you're shooting's off or you're not as quick you need to be.

You came to Atletico Madrid when you were very young, just 17. Was it very difficult making the transition from Argentinian to European football?
Yes, it's all very different. Regarding the standard of football, generally all the teams in La Liga have players who represent their country and that makes for high standards. There are very good players and teams are all difficult opponents. In Argentina it is different as the style of play is very open. Also, if it rains the pitch is wet, but if it doesn't rain it is dry. In Spain the pitch is always wet, come rain or shine. Teams are more organised here than in Argentina and things can get tricky if you're not playing well. In Argentina you play with a little more freedom, everything is less organised.

Do you still miss Argentinian football?
In the early days, when I first arrived, I did. But when you're playing in Europe at a big club and when you have the opportunity to play regularly against big teams, tough

Family affair...Maradona (left) and Aguero

Heir apparent...Aguero with his son, Benjamin

teams like Barcelona, Real Madrid, Villarreal and Valencia, at a very high level, then you know it's worth it.

After so many years in Spain, what do you miss most about Argentina?
I am still very Argentinian, but since I've been in Madrid I have developed a taste for some Spanish food, such as paella, which I love. I'm always on the lookout for Argentinian meat though, because we have different cuts to the Spanish. That's something I do miss, though there are some Argentinian butcher shops and restaurants that bring over good meat from home.

Do you think your son Benjamin, Maradona's grandson, will end up as a footballer?
I think he's going to be a boxer [laughs]. Only joking. I hope he is what he wants to be. Obviously as a father and as a footballer, and even though I'm going to be retiring when I'm older, I'd like him to play football. But I'm going to be his agent, though – not IMG, not Valdano, not anyone [laughs].

You're saying that because Jorge Valdano, the director of football at Real Madrid, said, as soon as he heard that your wife was pregnant, that there would be no better business than representing Benjamin because of his footballing genes...
Yes [laughs]. But no, I'm going to be representing him because there's a few mice sniffing around already [laughs], because *World Soccer* will come along and want to do an article. No, no, it's better that I look after him [laughs].

What do you think of Messi's recent World Player award?
It's well deserved. He's won the treble, something that every player wants to win, and he's got so much class too. There are plenty of quality players out there like Xavi, [Andreas] Iniesta, and Cristiano Ronaldo, but Lionel has proved that he is the best.

Do you think Messi can reach the same level as Pele or Maradona? Is that possible nowadays? Or is it too early to say?
It's different now because there are many players who are very good: Cristiano, Messi, Kaka, Xavi, Iniesta, that's half a dozen for you already, and there are many more. Before, Diego was on his own, or there were maybe two or three players who really stood out; now there are many. But like I keep saying, today, Messi is the best.

Do you agree with the view that Messi is not 100 per cent happy, because things aren't working out that well with Argentina and that it shows?
I don't know, but it's not his fault anyway, as we're 11 players, and it's a different thing playing for Argentina than playing for your club. With your team you train every day, you know how each player moves, you know where the ball is going to be played. With Argentina I do not always know exactly how Tevez is going to move, for example, and we have so far failed to become a team in which we all know each other well. But in the build-up to the World Cup we will have 40 days, which will give Maradona time to assemble a team that will do well.

Do not you think that the Argentina team is missing a creative linchpin, someone with the qualities of Juan Roman Riquelme?
Yes, but Messi can play that role, by dropping further back, and Pablo Aimar is also able to do it too. It all depends on how the coach wants the team to play. Each team has its characteristics, which is what we said before about the strikers – some teams play with a tall guy up front, others with two short ones.

Cesar Luis Menotti likened you to the former Brazil star Romario. Is that a fair comparison? Like him, you started as a playmaker...
I started on the right side of midfield. The thing is I'm not an out-and-out no9. I'm not a penalty-box player and I wasn't around when Romario was, but from what I saw on TV, in terms of how he made his runs, there might be a resemblance. He scored over 1,000 goals, though, and I've still got a way to go before I catch him (laughs).

Interview by Dan Brennan

National pride...South Africa beckons for Aguero and Argentina

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Bryan Robson

The former Middlesbrough, West Bromwich Albion and Sheffield United boss on his new challenge in Thailand

I've got nothing to prove

YOU'VE BEEN away from management since losing your job at Sheffield United. How did you end up taking over from Peter Reid as Thailand manager?
I was happy in the ambassadorial role that I have with Manchester United, things were going along nicely with that, but when you've been in football since you were 15 – when I joined West Brom – you miss the everyday involvement of training the players or being out on the training ground. I was missing that coaching side of it. When I worked with Terry Venables at the European Championships in 1996, I really enjoyed it and thought: "Yeah, one day when I have more experience I fancy that role." I had a look at the history of Thai football and the challenge ahead. I just thought the Asian Cup finals would be a good challenge in the early period, trying to qualify for that, and then looking further forward to the World Cup and trying to qualify for that.

Has the fact that Peter Reid resigned to return to work in the Premier League had an impact on the perception of you in Bangkok?
There have been quite a few people asking me how long I intend to stay. But I think it's always got to work both ways. If the Thai FA are happy with me and I'm happy with them, and things are going well, then I can see me staying for quite a while. I think the city's good, the hotels are great and the people are really courteous. But things can change very quickly.

How do you view the job in Thailand?
It will be an interesting challenge as a manager and, really, I don't see where I'm going to go unless I have success with the Thai national team. I've come here to try to enjoy it as much as I can and get as much success as I can. I haven't got my sights on anything, I haven't got my heart set on going back to the Premiership, because the one thing that overrides that is the Man United role. I'm lucky that I have an international job which is near enough part-time anyway. Hopefully, I'm going to work with the Thai league as well as the Thai FA to try and bring together some sort of structure within the country for youth development because there's not really anything in place at the moment.

How do you look back at your time at Middlesbrough?
We just didn't have a big enough squad to cope with the success we had in the cups. I was relying on the same 14 players all throughout the season and then after every big cup game we'd get beaten 1-0 in the league game because they couldn't raise that extra yard to get a goal. We got to two cup finals and then there was the replay in the League Cup Final, a replay in the semi-final of the FA Cup, and it all worked against us. If I could have had a little bit more funding just to add a couple more defenders to the team at that time I think we could have had a really good team.

Do you see this as a chance to rebuild your reputation out of the glare of the media spotlight?
Since I've been over here I've got quite a bit of media and there's been quite a lot of press. But I don't think I've got to prove anything to anybody. If people look back at my record in Middlesbrough, I was really successful there from where we were to where we went to. With West Brom, I think it's been proven by Gary Megson and Tony Mowbray and myself that, because of the budget the chairman wants you to try and stay in the Premiership with, it more or less makes the job impossible. That's why, even the year we were eight points adrift at Christmas and stayed up, I would class that as success, especially on the budget you have to work with. The only disappointment for me was that the Sheffield United fans didn't take to me and they got me out. I was only there for five months and I thought I was turning things around. Because of the fans' pressure, the chairman sacked me, but the chairman didn't want to do that because they asked me to be director of football. They wanted me to run that side of the club and offered me a great contract to do it, but I've never been one for directors of football. That would have gone against my principles if I had taken that job on.

> I don't see where I'm going to go unless I have success with the Thai national team

The Thais have talked for a long time about qualifying for the World Cup. Is that the long-term goal that you've been set and is it realistic?
It can always be a realistic proposition but you need to have a batch of good young kids all coming through at the same time. I've studied the under-20 team and seen some of the lads currently in the national team. But when we play some of the better teams in this area that will give me a gauge of how good some of the younger ones are. We have got four or five younger players who are around that 22-years-old mark, so I think that there's potential there. We just need to get another couple of youngsters so they can develop together. Then you have a realistic chance.

Interview by Michael Church

ARGENTINA

Diego PEROTTI

Sevilla's latest South American discovery

PERHAPS IT shouldn't have come as such a surprise. After all, Sevilla have a bit of previous; it's not as if the club's sporting director, Monchi, hasn't done it before.

It was his team of scouts that discovered Julio Baptista, bought him from Sao Paulo for just £1.75million and, 50 goals in two seasons later, sold him to Real Madrid for £16.9m. And it was his team, too, that uncovered an apparently unremarkable full-back by the name of Dani Alves at Bahia, signed him for £1m and sold him to Barcelona for £30m.

But even by those standards, left-winger Perotti is quite a find; no one expected him to be this good – in fact, most people didn't expect him to be good at all.

When Sevilla discovered the Argentinian, he was playing in the third tier for modest little Deportivo Moron. He had been ditched by Boca Juniors at 15 and, even though San Lorenzo and Velez Sarsfield looked at him, no one else was interested in signing him. Burnt by the experience, he was determined to prove them wrong.

"I left there very frustrated," he admits. "I think there are ways of telling a 15-year-old kid that he's not going to make it – and they didn't choose the right one.

"My time there was terrible. I could never understand why I never played; why I kept having trials only to see other kids jump ahead of me. When I left I had to test myself to see if I was wrong or they were."

Perotti joined Deportivo Moron and within six months he had forced his way into the first team. Sevilla signed him in 2007 for just £180,000 and placed him with their B team, Sevilla Atletico. Three years later, and still only 21, he's now in the first team and is being tracked by Real Madrid. "They are keen on Diego," the Argentinian's agent said. Rightly so, said everyone else.

Perotti played wonderfully well as Sevilla defeated Real Madrid 2-1 at the Sanchez Pizjuan in October and he drew what was described as the "save of the century" from Iker Casillas.

Only six months had passed since Perotti made his first-team debut but already he had become a regular – despite the presence of Diego Capel, the man earmarked as the club's next flying winger on the left. An Argentina cap soon followed when Perotti appeared for the final eight minutes of a friendly with Spain, replacing Leo Messi. The symbolism was not lost on those who saw it.

The son of a former Boca Juniors player and team-mate of Maradona, Perotti is small, skilful, and extremely quick. He also has a rare eye for the pass and his crossing is fantastically accurate. He is, says the country's best-selling newspaper, "a bullet that travels at dizzying speed".

He's also a bit different. When Perotti found out that he was going to get his first-team debut he was busy studying for exams at Seville University, where he is doing a degree in criminology. "Well," he shrugs, "my parents always told me I had to study in case I didn't make it as a player."

For a while, that looked like sound advice. Now, though, it looks like a future solving cases is some way off; there are defences to crack instead.

Sid Lowe

FACT FILE

Club	Sevilla
Country	Argentina
Born	July 26, 1988, in Moreno
Previous clubs	Boca Juniors, Deportivo Moron
International debut	November 2009 v Spain
International caps	1 (0 goals)

Raul FERNANDEZ

New national goalkeeping hope

THEY MAY have finished bottom of their World Cup qualifying group, but at least Peru's long-standing goalkeeping problem has been solved.

The experienced Leao Butron was one of the team's few success stories during the campaign – and an even more promising keeper stands by to take over for the 2014 qualifiers.

Known locally as "Superman", Raul Fernandez of Universitario is agile, elastic, confident in his handling, and boosted his reputation with a fine display in the recent Peruvian two-legged play-off Final against arch-rivals Alianza Lima.

Beaten coach Gustavo Costas said the keeper "won the game on his own", while Alianza president Guillermo Alarcon commented that "without Fernandez the U would have conceded at least three goals".

But just how much longer Fernandez will be playing in Peru is a moot point. Once on trial with Boca Juniors, there have been rumours that the Buenos Aires club might want to take him on a permanent basis, with Toulouse of France also said to be interested parties.

A move abroad, says Fernandez, "is something I've wanted and wished for since I was small, and I'll calmly keep working to ensure one day it happens".

Horacio Ballesteros, who was Universitario's keeper in the 70s, says: "He's a keeper with a strong personality. He comes out to narrow the angle and intercept crosses...and the U should be thinking about selling him abroad."

The fans will surely want him to stay for the coming Libertadores campaign, but the club may be tempted to ease their financial worries with a big money sale.

For club and country, the feats this superman is expected to perform are about to get harder.

Tim Vickery

PERU

FACT FILE

Club Universitario
Country Peru
Born October 6, 1985, in Lima
International debut March 2008 v Costa Rica
International caps 4
Honours Peruvian opening champion 2008, Peruvian championship 2008

Nassim BEN KHALIFA

Under-17 star commits to Swiss cause

SWITZERLAND

FACT FILE

Club Grasshopper
Country Switzerland
Born January 13, 1992, in Prangins
Honours Under-17 World Cup 2009

FORMER Germany midfielder Gunter Netzer is not a TV pundit who aims to please. So when he heaps praise on striker Nassim Ben Khalifa, the words carry some weight.

"The boy has enormous technical qualities and is unbelievably dangerous in and around the box," said Netzer on witnessing Ben Khalifa's contribution to Switzerland's victory at last year's Under-17 World Cup in Nigeria.

"He isn't only highly talented; for a teenager he's already very mature physically. If he stays level-headed and is not side-tracked by success and publicity, he has a great career in front of him."

Born in the eastern canton of Vaud to Tunisian parents, Ben Khalifa's height, power, blistering speed and grace on the ball made him a joy to behold at Nigeria 2009 and he fully deserved to be voted runner-up in the player of the tournament poll.

"Our Under-17s won the title because they played wonderfully as a unit, but within this framework Ben Khalifa obviously stood out," said ex-Switzerland skipper Marcel Koller.

"I just hope he doesn't go abroad too early. Sometimes it doesn't work out and the young player never recovers."

In a perfect world the youngster, who only made his top-flight debut last March, will be allowed to develop at his own pace in the Swiss Super League. But Hoppers, with debts of over £2.5million, will be sorely tempted to soak up the deficit with a quick sale to one of his many big-name suitors.

Internationally too, he could be thrown in at the deep end some time soon. Reports that Switzerland boss Ottmar Hitzfeld will give him a shot this year are multiplying by the day and federation technical director Hansruedi Hasler has hinted that a South African World Cup trip could be on the cards.

Nick Bidwell

ITALY

Daniele Galloppa

Gamble on midfielder pays off for Parma

BACK IN SERIE A after a year in absentia and already making a bid for Europe next term, Parma's revival owes much to the rapid integration of their summer signings: defenders Christian Panucci (Roma) and Cristian Zaccardo (Wolfsburg), strikers Nicola Amoruso (Torino) and Valeri Bojinov (loan from Manchester City), attacker Jonathan Biabiany (loan from Internazionale) and, possibly the most important of them all, left-sided midfielder Daniele Galloppa, whose surging runs have proved such a boon since arriving from Siena.

Parma can only be delighted that they, unlike other Italian clubs, were prepared to back their judgement of the 24-year-old. Napoli were very close to signing him in 2008, while Inter also failed to follow up their initial interest. Parma, though, stayed the course until the end, bringing him on board via a joint-ownership deal struck with Siena.

"We didn't think for a minute we were taking a risk with Galloppa," says Parma coach Francesco Guidolin. "We were on solid ground with him. He had been doing well in Serie A for some time and was a new man in Marcello Lippi's Italy squad.

"Daniele meets all the requirements of the very top level: good skills, understanding of the game and energy – and I'm convinced he has the ability to become much more of a goalscorer. I'm not into handing out lessons to others but, to me, he has the look of a top international."

Lippi gave Galloppa his first run out for the *Azzurri* in a friendly against Northern Ireland at the end of last season and then picked him for a November fixture with Sweden. Someone of his purpose and fresh-faced ambition could be just the tonic an ageing Italy need on the eve of a World Cup.

Born in the Italian capital, Galloppa was taken on by Roma aged nine and went on to star for their youth team. Yet despite representing his country in several age categories, he was not deemed suitable for first-team service and was loaned to Triestina and Ascoli prior to moving to Siena in 2007.

His Roma rejection still rankles and explains why he has made a habit of often speaking out against Italian clubs who would rather shop abroad for players than rear their own, claiming: "In Italy we lack patience. The problem is the exasperation which builds around football. After match day on Sunday, we should all live more calmly for the rest of the week.

"I wasn't disappointed by the way Roma treated me, but it did hurt.

"The reason I signed permanently for Siena was they had more trust in me."

Little wonder Galloppa loves it at Parma. Part of a squad which scores high in its quotas of Italians and youngsters, he very much embodies those priorities.

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

Club Parma
Country Italy
Born May 15, 1985, in Rome
Previous clubs Roma, Triestina (loan), Ascoli (loan), Siena
International debut June 2008 v Northern Ireland
International caps 2 (0 goals)

FIVE TO FOLLOW

Nick Bidwell profiles five African talents in Europe

Club/Country Valenciennes (Fra)/Morocco
Born October 9, 1982
Position Midfielder

Fahid BEN KHALFALLAH

UNTIL the age of almost 26, the right-winger/creative midfielder had to make do with a bread-and-water diet in the French second and third tiers. But since cracking the top flight 18 months ago – first at Caen and now with Valenciennes – he has established himself as one of the best purveyors of a through ball in the entire country.

As thoughtful on the ball as he is in the lecture theatre, where he has a degree in sports management.

Club/Country Ajax (Ned)/Cameroon
Born August 19, 1986
Position Midfielder

Eyong ENOH

THESE are exciting times for the 23-year-old defensive midfielder who has not only carved a niche for himself in the Ajax first team, but also forced his way into a World Cup-bound Cameroon squad.

After beginning his career with the University of Buea and the Mount Cameroon club, this devout Christian then played for Turkish-Cypriot side Magusa Turk Gucu before enjoying a brilliant four-year spell at Ajax Cape Town – who are the Amsterdammers' sub-Saharan satellite club.

Club/Country Siena (Ita)/Algeria
Born December 5, 1984
Position Forward

Abdelkader GHEZZAL

THE plucky France-born striker is proof that rejection by a big club need not mean the end of the dream.

He was only 16 when released by his home-town outfit Lyon, yet he still managed to work his way back to the mainstream via impressive performances for part-time sides in the Lyon region, and then lower league Italian teams Crotone and Pro Sesto, before joining Siena in 2008.

Club/Country Mainz (Ger)/Burkina Faso
Born September 19, 1984
Position Forward

Aristide BANCE

HIS club's top scorer with 14 goals in their promotion-winning campaign last term, he has kept up the good work in the Bundesliga again this season.

Always in the thick of the action, he poses no end of problems for defenders with his speed off the mark, physical presence and aerial ability.

Highly conspicuous thanks to his blonde hair, the 25-year-old was heavily fined in December for directing an obscene gesture at provocative Eintracht Frankfurt stopper Maik Franz.

Club/Country Maritimo (Por)/Angola
Born May 30, 1981
Position Forward

DJALMA

RIGHT-FOOTED left-winger who has caught the eye in Portugal this term with his blinding acceleration and unstoppable breaks in from the flank.

Those who know his family history should not be startled by the 22-year-old's success though: his father, Abel Campos, played on the wing for Benfica in the late 1990s.

Djalma is now back in the good books of Angola coach Manuel Jose after being thrown out of the squad for breaking a curfew on the eve of a game last June.

SOCCER CITIES

TURIN The clubs, the history, what to see, how to get there

Local

Peterjon Cresswell takes a tour of the Italian city where it is claimed that the majority of fans support their home's lower-division team

FEW FOOTBALL CITIES have experienced such historic drama as Turin. Scene of the Superga air disaster that claimed the entire Torino team in 1949 and home of the mighty Juventus, who lost 39 fans at Heysel in 1985, Turin is a city of two clubs: working-class *Il Toro* and classy *La Juve*, both of whom play at the revamped Comunal, now renamed Stadio Olimpico.

At the southern end of town, by the main Corso Unione Sovietica, the locality of the Stadio Olimpico is the traditional fan base for both clubs, comprising the Fiat car plant and the Mirafiori housing estate.

For much of the 20th century, Juventus were backed by the Fiat-owning Agnelli family, with Torino supported by the factory workers. Then, as now, most support for *La Vecchia Signora* (the old lady) comes from all over Italy, while Torino claim to be the team the locals follow.

Juventus were founded in 1897 by pupils of Massimo d'Azeglio grammar school and the bench they met on stands at the club HQ on Piazza Crimea. When they were threatened with a move out of town, several Juve members formed a breakaway club, Torino, with their symbol being the bull of Turin. Among these founders was Vittorio Pozzo, who would later go on to be a double World Cup-winning coach and was extremely influential at Torino during the pre-war era.

In 1923 the Agnellis took over Juventus and brought in top talent to win five consecutive titles a decade later. World Cup winners Raimundo Orsi, Luis Monti, Luigi Bertolini, Giovanni Ferrari and Gianpiero Combi were the key players wearing Juve's famous black-and-white stripes – a strip which originated from English club Notts County.

Making history

Meanwhile, Pozzo sought to make history for the *Granata*, the clarets of Torino. He commandeered Venezia's inside-forward duo Ezio Loik and Valentino Mazzola, who were born on the same day in 1919 and had a seemingly telepathic understanding. This formed the basis of the Grande Torino side of the 1940s, lighting up Torino's beloved old Campo Filadelfia near today's Olimpico.

Playing an intelligent 4-4-2, and forming almost the entire national side, Torino won consecutive scudettos by large margins. Approaching a fifth title, they flew to Lisbon to play a testimonial friendly with Benfica – and crashed into the hilltop Basilica of Superga outside Turin on their return. It was Pozzo who had to identify the bodies.

The *Granata* duly moved from Filadelfia to groundshare with Juve at the Comunale. Gigi Meroni then led a Toro revival until his fatal accident on Corso Re Umberto in 1967. A decade later, forward partnership Paulo Pulici and Francesco Graziani gained Toro their only post-Superga

Zebra stampede...Juventus players celebrate scoring against Bayern Munich in Turin

THE STADIUMS

1 STADIO OLIMPICO
Built as Stadio Mussolini in 1932, it was renamed the Comunale after the war and used by both Juventus and, later, Torino until the opening of the Stadio delle Alpi in 1990. Moribund for a decade, the 27,500-capacity venue was then used for the opening/closing ceremonies of the 2006 Winter Olympics. It will become Torino's Stadio Grande when Juventus move into their own arena.

2 JUVENTUS ARENA
The Zebras hope to move into their new stadium, on the site of the old Stadio delle Alpi, by 2011. Its planned capacity is 41,000.

title and the local rivalry with Juventus, *il Derby della Mole*, became fearsome.

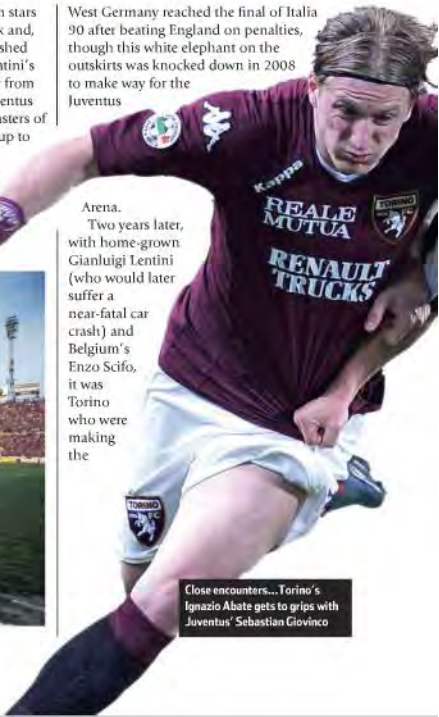
In 1977 Juve won their first European trophy, the UEFA Cup. The Zebras had enjoyed much domestic success with foreigners such as Denmark's John Hansen, then John Charles of Wales and Argentina's Omar Sivori, but it was the Italians Roberto Bettega, Dino Zoff and Franco Causio that made Juve a European force.

Along with Marco Tardelli, Antonio Cabrini and Gaetano Scirea, this was the spine of the Italy side that impressed and then succeeded at the World Cups of 1978 and 1982. The arrival of more foreign stars such as Liam Brady, Zbigniew Boniek and, most importantly, Michel Platini, pushed Juventus to another level. Despite Platini's imperial presence – top league scorer from midfield three seasons running – Juventus were never fully acknowledged as masters of Europe, losing the 1983 European Cup to Hamburg and winning an irrelevant Final against Liverpool in the chaos of Heysel.

In 1990 Juve moved into the Stadio delle Alpi, where West Germany reached the final of Italia 90 after beating England on penalties, though this white elephant on the outskirts was knocked down in 2008 to make way for the Juventus Arena.

Two years later, with home-grown Gianluigi Lentini (who would later suffer a near-fatal car crash) and Belgium's Enzo Scifo, it was Torino who were making the

Field of dreams...the old Stadio Comunale, home of both Torino and Juventus



Close encounters... Torino's Ignazio Abate gets to grips with Juventus' Sebastian Giovinco

headlines in their only European Final, losing to Ajax in the UEFA Cup.

However, under Marcello Lippi, and with stars such as Roberto Baggio, Andreas Moller and Gianluca Vialli, Juve were soon back in business, winning the Champions League and UEFA Cup in the early 90s, along with three more *scudettos* at the end of the decade.

Helping to surpass Franco Baresi's Milan were Zinedine Zidane and Alessandro Del Piero, who would become the club's record-breaking scorer, seeing a 25th title triumph in 1998, as well as Lippi's departure and return. Accompanied by Pavel Nedved, Gianluigi Buffon and David Trezeguet, the

"Helping Juve to surpass Baresi's Milan were Zidane and Del Piero"

Zebras won further back-to-back titles but lost the European Cup Final of 2003 to Milan. Two further titles, under Fabio Capello, were struck from the record books after a match-fixing scandal and relegated Juve eventually played their way out of an enforced season in Serie B. The club have since had consecutive if disappointing appearances in the Champions League, with a 4-1 home defeat by Bayern Munich in December 2009 a new low.

Meanwhile, Torino continue to flit between Serie A and B, currently playing in the second tier after relegation last season. ●

TURIN SURVIVAL GUIDE

A grand old city

● TRANSPORT
Caselle airport is 10 miles north of the city centre, a short drive from the Juventus Arena. An express train (€3) runs every 30 minutes to Dora and Porta Nuova stations, taking 20 to 30 minutes. A taxi costs about €40 and takes 30 minutes. Public transport (www.gtt.to.it) – rail, trams and buses – with a day pass costing €3. Single tickets are available at most stations.

● HOTELS
Hotel booking and info at www.turismotorino.org. Main tourist office is at Piazza Solferino (+39 011 535 181). Options near the Stadio Olimpico include the four-star Hotel Cairo (Via La Loggia 6, +39 011 317 1555, www.hotelcairo.it, €90-€150), two Meridien hotels on Via Nizza (Art&Tech, +39 011 664 2000 and Lingotto, +39 011 664 2001, www.lemeridien-lingotto.it, from €130), and the three-star Astor (Piazza Tancredi Galimberti 12, +39 011 317 3073, www.hotelastortorino.it, €80-€120).

● EATING & DRINKING
Piedmont is known for its egg-rich pastas and truffles. Look out for local staples agnolotti (ravioli stuffed with lamb and cabbage) and polenta. Near the Stadio Olimpico, La Pista (Via Nizza 262, +39 011 631 3523) offers fine views and quality local dishes. More affordably, Sotto La Mole (Via Montebello 9, +39 011 817 9398) provides regional classics below the Mole Antonelliana. For something lively, try the themed John Lennon pub (Corso Giovanni Agnelli 160), near the stadium.

● DAYTIME ENTERTAINMENT
Turin is grandiose, typified by the baroque landmark of the Palazzo Reale (Piazzetta Reale, +39 011 436 1455) and Palazzo Madama (Piazza Castello, +39 011 442 9912). Other attractions include the Duomo on Piazza San Giovanni, the Mole Antonelliana tower (Via Montebello 20) and the Piazza della Repubblica's daily market.

● MATCH DAY
On Corso Sebastopol, near Lignotto station (tramlines 4 and 10), Stadio Olimpico is easily accessible. Obtain tickets from www.juventus.it or the Juventus Store Torino (Via Garibaldi 4E, +39 011 433 8709), and www.torinofc.it or the Granata Store (Piazza Castello 10, +39 011 542 348). Tickets with the home fans in the Curva are €20, or €35 in the family-friendly Tribuna Laterale. Serie B Torino games are cheaper.

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

● Stadio Olimpico

Feb 6 Torino v Brescia (Serie B)
Feb 13 Juventus v Genoa (Serie A)
Feb 20 Torino v Salernitana (Serie B)
Feb 25 Juventus v Ajax (Europa League)
Feb 28 Juventus v Palermo (Serie A)
Mar 6 Torino v Frosinone (Serie B)

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MISCELLANEOUS

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World beaters

After falling behind to an early goal, Barcelona's Yaya Toure (no24) and Zlatan Ibrahimovic put the pressure on CONCACAF champions Atlante of Mexico in their Club World Cup semi-final in Abu Dhabi. More information, pages 85 and 102.

Full time...Hart

ALGERIA
World Cup warm-up
Rabah Saadane's side have arranged a friendly with fellow World Cup finalists Serbia in Algiers on March 3.

CANADA
Hart named new boss
Caretaker coach Stephen Hart has been handed the national team job on a permanent basis. The 49-year-old, who led Canada to the quarter-finals of the Gold Cup in July, was also in charge when they reached the Gold Cup semi-finals in 2007.

INDIA
Keeper is spot on
Goalkeeper Arindam Bhattacharya was voted player of the tournament as India Under-23s beat Maldives 3-1 on penalties to win their fourth South Asian Football Federation Championship title.

In the Final, Bhattacharya saved spot-kicks from Ahmed Thoriq and Nasser Mukhtar, while Ali Ashfaq fired wide.

UGANDA
Cranes triumph in CECAFA Cup again
A goal in each half was enough to give Uganda a 2-0 victory over arch-rivals Rwanda in the CECAFA Cup Final.

Dan Wagaluka and substitute Emma Okwi were the goalscorers in Bangladesh as Uganda claimed their 11th CECAFA title since the tournament started in 1973.

Uganda's Scottish coach Bobby Williamson commented: "We kept improving in every game and this was a fantastic tournament for us."

RESULTS

CECAFA CUP
(Council of East and Central Africa Football Associations)

In Kenya

Group A
Nov 28 - Nairobi
Kenya 0
Zambia 2 (Chamanga 88, F Sunzu 90)
HT: 0-0

Nov 30 - Nairobi
Djibouti 0
Ethiopia 5 (Ayenew 49, Girma 53, Tesfaye 55, Ilkuri 70, 88)
HT: 0-0

Dec 2 - Nairobi
Kenya 2 (Odhiambo 23, Wanga 44)
Djibouti 0
HT: 2-0

Dec 2 - Nairobi
Ethiopia 0
Zambia 1 (Chamanga 30)
HT: 0-1

Dec 4 - Nairobi
Kenya 2 (Baraza 1, Wanga 46)
Ethiopia 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 4 - Nairobi
Zambia 6 (Chola 4, 49, 89, F Sunzu 33, Hachipuka 65, Siyingwa 74)
Djibouti 0
HT: 2-0

CECAFA CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zambia	3	3	0	0	9	0	9
Kenya	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Ethiopia	3	1	0	2	5	3	3
Djibouti	3	0	0	3	0	13	0

Group B
Nov 29 - Nairobi
Somalia 0
Rwanda 1 (Mwaimu og 4)
HT: 0-1

Dec 1 - Nairobi
Zimbabwe 0
Eritrea 0

Dec 3 - Nairobi
Eritrea 1 (Goitom 85)
Rwanda 2 (Y Ndayishimiye 19, Wakiay og 38)
HT: 0-2

Dec 3 - Nairobi
Somalia 0
Zimbabwe 2 (Tapiwa 31, Guthrie pen 46)
HT: 0-1

Dec 5 - Nairobi
Eritrea 3 (Andberhian pen 25, Tsegay 27, Yasin og 60)
Somalia 1 (Copinil 70)
HT: 2-0

Dec 5 - Nairobi
Zimbabwe 0
Rwanda 1 (Y Ndayishimiye 10)
HT: 0-1

CECAFA CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rwanda	3	3	0	0	4	1	9
Eritrea	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Zimbabwe	3	1	1	1	2	1	4
Somalia	3	0	0	3	1	6	0

Group C
Nov 29 - Mumias
Zanzibar 4 (Morris 15, Nakizimana og 18, Kassim 25, Mbazumutima og 67)
Burundi 0
HT: 3-0

Nov 29 - Mumias
Tanzania 0
Uganda 2 (Kasule 3, Sserumagi 88)
HT: 0-1

Dec 1 - Mumias
Tanzania 1 (Ngassa 18)
Zanzibar 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 2 - Mumias
Burundi 0
Uganda 2 (Massa 12, Wagaluka 67)
HT: 0-1

Dec 4 - Mumias
Burundi 0
Tanzania 1 (Ngassa 48)
HT: 0-0

Dec 4 - Mumias
Zanzibar 0
Uganda 0

CECAFA CUP – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uganda	3	2	1	0	4	0	7
Tanzania	3	2	0	1	2	2	6
Zanzibar	3	1	1	1	4	1	4
Burundi	3	0	0	3	0	7	0

Top two in each group and the two third-placed teams with best record qualified for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals
Dec 7 - Nairobi
Zambia 0
Zanzibar 0
Zanzibar 4-3 on pens

Dec 7 - Nairobi
Uganda 1 (Ssentongo 62)
Kenya 0
HT: 0-0

Dec 8 - Nairobi
Tanzania 4 (Bocco 62, Ngassa 65, 78, 85)
Eritrea 0
HT: 0-0

Dec 8 - Nairobi
Rwanda 4 (Y Ndayishimiye 31, Ndamuhanga 68, 78, Niyonzima 89)
Zimbabwe 1 (Mizwa 8)
HT: 1-1

Semi-finals
Dec 9 - Nairobi
Uganda 2 (Bengo 3, Hamoud og 12)
Zanzibar 1 (Abdullah 74)
HT: 2-0

Dec 10 - Nairobi
Tanzania 1 (Mgosi 80)
Rwanda 2 (Y Ndayishimiye 60, Mafisango 78)
HT: 0-0

Third-place play-off
Dec 13 - Nairobi
Zanzibar 1 (Kassim 70)
Tanzania 0
HT: 0-0

Final
Dec 13 - Nairobi
Uganda 2 (Wagaluka 40, Okwi 73)
Rwanda 0
HT: 1-0

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP
(South Asian Football Federation)

In Dhaka, Bangladesh

Group A
Dec 5
Maldives 1 (Thoriq 61)
Nepal 1 (J Rai 68)
HT: 0-0

Dec 5
India U-23 1 (Lilpekhlua 86)
Afghanistan 0
HT: 0-0

Dec 7
Maldives 3 (Thoriq 52, Ashfaq 70, 86)
Afghanistan 1 (Barakzai 30)
HT: 0-1

Dec 7
India U-23 1 (S K Singh 17)
Nepal 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 9
Afghanistan 0
Nepal 3 (A Gurung 55, 73, B Gurung 66)
HT: 0-0

Dec 9
Maldives 2 (Thoriq 16, Fazeel 83)
India U-23 0
HT: 1-0
Sent off: Balwant Singh (India U-23) 61min

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maldives	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
India U-23	3	2	0	1	2	2	6
Nepal	3	1	1	1	4	2	4
Afghanistan	3	0	0	3	1	7	0

Group B
Dec 4
Sri Lanka 1 (Gunarathne pen 26)
Pakistan 0
HT: 1-0
Sent off: Dumidu 84min, Kumara 85min (both Sri Lanka)

Dec 4
Bangladesh 4 (Das 11, Haque 23, 50, Emil 72)
Bhutan 1 (Dendup pen 43)
HT: 2-1

Dec 6
Bangladesh 0
Pakistan 0

Dec 6
Sri Lanka 6 (Channa 7, 25, Jayasuriya 39, 86, 78, Gunarathne 90)
Bhutan 0
HT: 3-0

Dec 8
Pakistan 7 (Essa 28, 54, Ashraf 23, Mehmood 27, 36, 65, S Khan 45)
Bhutan 0
HT: 5-0

Dec 8
Bangladesh 2 (Haque 8, 86)
Sri Lanka 1 (Channa 42)
HT: 1-1

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bangladesh	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Sri Lanka	3	2	0	1	8	2	6
Pakistan	3	1	1	1	7	1	4
Bhutan	3	0	0	3	1	17	0

Top two in both groups qualified for semi-finals

Semi-finals
Dec 11
Maldives 5 (Thoriq 21, Fazeel 63, pen 85, Ashfaq 76, Ali 87)
Sri Lanka 1 (Channa 62)
HT: 1-0

Dec 11
Bangladesh 0
India U-23 1 (S K Singh 63)
HT: 0-0

Final
Dec 13
Maldives 0
India U-23 0
Aet, India 3-1 on pens

FRIENDLIES

Sunday, November 29
Nov 29 - Calcutta, India
Nepal 2 (A Gurung, B Gurung)
Bhutan 1 (Tsiring pen)
HT: 0-0

Saturday, December 5
Dec 5 - Roseau
Dominica 4 (Austrie 8, Peters 23, Benjamin 25, Dangleben 85)
British Virgin Islands 0
HT: 3-0

CLUB WORLD CUP

Six of the best for Barca

LIONEL MESSI capped a remarkable year for himself and Barcelona by puffing out his chest to push the ball into the net for the winning goal in their 2-1 extra-time victory over Estudiantes in the Club World Cup Final in the United Arab Emirates.

Barcelona added the trophy – one which they missed out on in 2006, having also lost the World Club (Intercontinental) Cup Final in 1992 – to the five others they won in 2009: La Liga, the Spanish Cup, the Champions League, the Spanish Supercup and the European Supercup.

Pedro, who scored the 89th-minute equaliser to break the hearts of the Libertadores Cup holders' 5,000 travelling fans, found the net in all six competitions and in their five finals.

Messi and Pedro were just two of the players who bear testimony to the tremendous success of Barca's youth scheme, while Zlatan Ibrahimovic has confirmed that when the Catalan club make a signing they choose well.

Barcelona started favourites to win the tournament and it was fitting, in a showcase involving the champions of each continent, that their fine attacking brand of football should come out on top. However, they had to be at their very best to thwart Estudiantes' pretentions to a second world crown, following their victory in 1968.

Juan Sebastian Veron, at the hub of the Argentinian side's midfield, worked his socks off and was voted second-best player of the tournament (behind compatriot Messi) but the South American champions were unable to repeat the class performance that won the Libertadores in July.

Having taken the lead with Mauro Boselli's fine headed goal in the first half, Estudiantes were pushed back into their own half in the second as Barcelona attacked them from all

World champions...Carles Puyol lifts yet another trophy for Barcelona

Star attraction...Messi clinched the Club World Cup with the winner in the Final

angles before Pedro finally lobbed goalkeeper Damian Albil from central defender Gerard Pique's headed pass.

The weight of Barcelona's talents became too much for a tiring Estudiantes team in extra time and Messi darted between two defenders to chest home Dani Alves' right-wing cross in the second period of extra time.

Europe and South America dominated the event once again, with the Champions League winners taking the title for the third year in a row, after Milan in 2007 and Manchester United in 2008.

Asian champions Pohang Steelers of South Korea, with their Brazilian influence, took third place on penalties after a 1-1 draw, though the spot should have gone to Mexico's Atlante, the CONCACAF's representatives, who had the lion's share of chances in their play-off, with Argentinian midfielder Gabriel Pereyra hitting the woodwork three times.

Coaches Jose Cruz of Atlante and Sergio Farias of Pohang Steelers agreed that the tournament was a good experience for their teams, but Farias was upset by the refereeing of Pohang's 2-1 semi-final defeat against Estudiantes when they had three players sent off. In the post-match news conference the Brazilian even implied that the organisers wanted to maintain the status quo in the Final.

However, the problem was more to do with Italian referee Roberto Rosetti's use of his yellow card from the off – a mistake avoided by the referees in the final day's two matches when they issued firm warnings first.

Pohang Steelers were rough and

somewhat naive in their tackling, but at least two of their bookings in the second half did not merit sendings off – except that the fouls were committed by players who already had one yellow to their names.

Brazilian striker Denilson, back in the country where he spent six years of his widely travelled career, scored all four of Pohang's goals to finish the tournament as top scorer. Four players scored twice: Messi, Pedro, Estudiantes midfielder Leandro Benitez and Auckland City's Jason Hayne.

Final clash...Puyol (in orange) gets to grips with Estudiantes' Christian Cellay

The amateurs from Auckland finished a surprise fifth and will have taken enormous benefit for themselves and the Oceania confederation with victories over UAE champions Al Ahli and Africa's TP Mazembe of DR Congo.

Mazembe paraded some fine attacking talent, particularly their captain Mabi Mputu, but they lacked organisation in defence, with their rudimentary efforts to play an offside trap letting them down twice in their 3-2 fifth-place play-off defeat by the New Zealanders.

FIFA congratulated themselves on a switch from Japan to the Emirates which worked in terms of organisation and logistics but suffered the unexpected glitch of Al Ahli's defeat in the quarter-final play-off – a result that affected attendances until Barcelona entered the fray.

Sheikh Mohammed Khalfan al Rumaithi, president of the UAE FA, had harsh words for Al Ahli at the FIFA news conference, berating them for their poor preparation and calling on the team that wins the league this year to do better.

FIFA will not budge for the time being on the format of the tournament. They are happy with it while it has little effect on the participating teams' domestic calendar. In fact, Barcelona were the most affected as their semi-final was their third match in eight days in three different competitions, following a Champions League match a week earlier and the Catalan capital's derby in between.

One day, no doubt, a team from one of the other confederations will get a result and contest the Final. They are not too far off, but the world is still waiting for an African or Asian nation to lift the World Cup and may continue to wait after this summer's jamboree in South Africa, where Brazil are more likely winners than, say, Ivory Coast, Cameroon or Nigeria.

Estudiantes' fans were hugely impressive, creating a real atmosphere at their two games. Most had travelled all the way from La Plata: one having sold his car to foot the bill, while two others had been at Old Trafford in 1968, where they watched Veron's father, Juan Ramon, head the team in front in a 1-1 draw that ended with Estudiantes clinching the world title 2-1 on aggregate.

However, the popularity of the Club World Cup depends hugely on local interest and the Japanese guaranteed good support during the four years they staged the tournament. In Abu Dhabi, it was the big names that drew the crowds and the locals wanted to see Messi more than they did Barcelona.

Perhaps his two-goal performance will go a long way towards ensuring the popularity of the tournament in the UAE next year.

Rex Gowar

• **For further details, see page 102**

Marching orders...Pohang Steelers keeper Shin Hwa-yong is sent off against Estudiantes

Hot shot...Auckland City's two-goal hero Hayne (right)

Top scorer...Pohang Steelers' Denilson

Europe Former winners crash out

Danger...Liverpool's Daniel Agger (left) and Martin Skrtel struggle to contain Fiorentina's Gilardino

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

LIVERPOOL and Juventus were the biggest casualties in the group stage after they both failed to qualify for the knockout phase of the tournament and slipped into the Europa League.

Other big names struggled, but Bayern Munich pulled off a miraculous escape at the expense of Juventus, while Internazionale got the results they needed in their final two games to stay on course.

In the opening game of Group E, Liverpool could only manage a 1-0 home win over Debrecen of Hungary – an early indication that Rafa Benitez's side might struggle against stronger teams. And so it proved in their next match, away to Fiorentina, for whom Montenegrin teenager Stevan Jovetic was outstanding, scoring both of the game's goals.

Liverpool's fate was effectively sealed in the following match, at home to Lyon. After taking a first-half lead through Yossi Benayoun, the English side seemed on course for victory, but they conceded two late goals to Lyon substitutes Maxime Gonalons and Cesar Delgado to lose 2-1.

In the next game, away to Lyon, Hugo Lloris made a string of fine saves but a thunderbolt shot from Ryan Babel late on looked to have restored Liverpool's fortunes. However, Lisandro Lopez snatched a last-minute equaliser to seal Lyon's qualification for the knockout round and leave Liverpool chasing Fiorentina, who had won a thrilling match 4-3 against Debrecen.

Fiorentina's 1-0 win over Lyon, thanks to a Juan Vargas penalty, ensured Fiorentina qualified for the knockout stage for the first time. An injury-time winner from Alberto Gilardino at Anfield on the final match day added to Liverpool's frustration and also ensured that Fiorentina topped the group.

In Group A, Bordeaux continued their steady progress under Laurent Blanc by going unbeaten in their six games and registering the highest points total (16) of any team in the group stages.

But the biggest story of the group centred on Bayern, who had looked dead and buried after home and away losses to the French champions.

> The biggest story centred on Bayern Munich, who had looked dead and buried after home and away losses to Lyon

Coach Louis Van Gaal salvaged their season – and his own position – with a remarkable comeback. First, Bayern eked out a win at home to Maccabi Haifa, then, in the most remarkable result of the group stage, they won 4-1 in Turin. Despite going behind to an early David Trezeguet goal, Van Gaal's men responded through goalkeeper Hans-Jorg Butt (with a penalty), Ivica Olic, Mario Gomez and Anatoliy Tymoshchuk to condemn Juventus to the lesser Europa League.

Manchester United's qualification for the knockout round was never in doubt in Group B after last season's beaten finalists won their first three games. However, they were given a scare when late goals from Paul Scholes and Antonio Valencia were needed to deny CSKA Moscow a famous win at Old Trafford.

Besiktas went one better, winning 1-0 to become the first away team to win at Old Trafford in the Champions League since 2005. But the English champions recovered their poise in their final group game, gaining the point needed against Wolfsburg to qualify as group winners.

The German champions had gone into the game with hopes of making the knockout stages, but CSKA Moscow,

who had beaten them thanks to a stunning individual goal from Milos Krasic, then won 2-1 in Besiktas to qualify for the knockout phase at Wolfsburg's expense.

Real Madrid opened Group C with a powerful 5-2 away win in Zurich, which included two goals from record signing Cristiano Ronaldo – who added two more in a 3-0 defeat of Marseille.

But they suffered a setback when they lost a 3-2 thriller at home to Milan. The Italians recovered from an early error by goalkeeper Dida, who let an Esteban Granero shot slip through his fingers, allowing Raul to pounce for the opening goal.

The scoreline then see-sawed until Alexandre Pato sealed victory for Milan in the final minute.

Milan's win allowed them to bounce back from a surprise home defeat by Zurich, when Finland international Hannu Tihinen scored the only goal of the game.

Milan then saw off the challenge of Marseille to take second place in the group behind Madrid.

Chelsea and Porto dominated Group D. Atletico Madrid were comprehensively beaten by Chelsea at Stamford Bridge, prompting the sacking of coach Abel Resino.

Group F proved to be the tightest group of the stage, with Barcelona and Internazionale, two of the pre-season favourites, only confirming their qualification for the last 16 on the final match day.

Reigning champions Barcelona suffered a shock home defeat to Russian champions Rubin Kazan. Midfielder Aleksandr Ryazantsev gave Rubin an early lead with a fizzing long-range shot, then Zlatan Ibrahimovic equalised for Barca, only for Gokdeniz Karadeniz to finish an excellent Russian counter-attack.

The two teams met again two weeks later, with Rubin holding out for a 0-0 draw at home to leave Barcelona facing possible elimination. But Barca bounced back on the penultimate match day to beat Inter 2-0 at Camp Nou with goals from centre-back Gerard Pique and emerging star Pedro.

That result piled the pressure back on Inter, who had drawn their first three games but then won away at Dynamo Kyiv in a dramatic game to stay in contention. Andriy Shevchenko had given the Ukraine club a first-half lead which lasted until late in the game, when Inter scored through Diego Milito and Wesley Sneijder.

With the pressure back on Inter, the Italian champions delivered with a powerful performance against Rubin. Goals in either half by Samuel Eto'o and Mario Balotelli fired them into the last 16.

Sevilla underlined their potential by winning Group G ahead of Stuttgart, who sacked coach Markus Babbel after a run of poor form in the Bundesliga.

Stuttgart managed to seal their place in the knockout stages after beating Romanian champions Unirea 3-1 in their final group match. The Germans' three goals were scored in the first 11 minutes.

Arsenal were comfortable winners of Group H, only dropping points away to AZ – for whom David Mendes da Silva equalised with a stunning injury-time volley – and against Olympiakos on the final match day, by which time Arsenal were already qualified for the knockout stages, to allow the Greeks into the last 16 as group runners-up.

John Holmesdale

Bad day at the office...Juventus keeper Gianluigi Buffon was beaten four times by Bayern in Turin

ARMENIA
No stopping Pyunik

REIGNING champions Pyunik won their ninth successive Premier League title, adding the Armenian Cup in the process to secure a fourth double.

Coach Vardan Minasyan's youthful team were pushed all the way by Mika, but Pyunik underlined their dominance with a 4-0 victory over the eventual runners-up on the final day of the season, with Brazil-born Armenia international Marcos Pizzelli scoring a hat-trick.

"Opponents played against my young footballers with double energy and I'm happy my team progressed and showed itself as a united group of players," said Minasyan.

Arat took Pyunik to a play-off game after finishing level on points the previous term, but they fell apart last season and were relegated.

Nikolai Kalvas

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
HRAYR MKOYAN (Ulisses)
Central defender who made his international debut in September and helped his side to third place before joining Mika at the end of the season.

ESTONIA
Centenary celebrations

DESPITE all the pre-season posturing of Flora Tallinn, Nomme Kalju, Sillamae Kalev and Narva Trans, it was business as usual in the year that Estonia celebrated 100 years of football in the Baltic nation with Levadia Tallinn easily winning their fourth successive title, finishing 21 points ahead of their closest rival.

It wasn't until two games before the end of the season that Levadia lost in the league for the first time – a 2-1 defeat away to Trans bringing to an end their 61-game unbeaten league run.

The club from the capital ended the campaign just three points shy of the 100-points mark. And having sold striker Nikita Andreev, who scored 17 goals in the first 17 games, to Spanish club Almeria in the middle of the season, it was of little comfort to the rest of the league when coach Igor Prins observed: "We have not reached our potential yet."

Sillamae Kalev were runners-up in only their second season back in the top flight, while Trans finished third on equal points.

The campaign was a complete nightmare, however, for the seven-time champion Flora Tallinn.

With a budget that was three times

BELARUS
BATE make it look easy

IT was more of the same for BATE Borisov – the provincial club who represent and are sponsored by Borisov Works of Automobile and Tractor Electric Equipment – as they won a fourth successive Premier League title.

"After winning the Belarus league I can say that the current squad is even stronger than [the one] we had last season when BATE qualified for the group stage of the Champions League," claimed coach Victor Goncharenko.

"The main difference is that we have a clear leader in every area of the team. Goalkeeper Sergei Veremko was reliable between the posts. In defence Ihor Shitov showed excellent commanding skills. Dmitri Likhtarovich was the linchpin in midfield, while the energetic Maxim Skavysh terrorised the defence of every club from the first until the final day of the season."

After winning their first seven games, including a 3-1 victory away to their biggest rivals Dinamo Minsk, BATE's surprise elimination from the Champions League on away goals against Ventspils of Latvia was followed by league defeats by Shakhtyor Soligorsk (2-3) and Dnepr Mahilyov (1-3). However, they soon regained their composure and didn't lose another league game all season.

"A huge part of our current success is due to the experience our players received in last season's Champions

Celebrate...Kryvets (centre) had a season to remember with BATE

League in matches against the likes of Real Madrid and Juventus," added Goncharenko. "They simply understood that there are no limits of development in football. They've gained confidence that helped them in the most difficult days of the championship."

Runners-up Dinamo Minsk have an excellent football academy and boast the youngest squad in the league with an average age of under 23. Club president Yuri Chizh – who has appointed 19 different coaches since taking charge in 1999 – showed no signs of changing his ways, sacking Slavoljub Muslin after the 4-1 defeat by Tromso of Norway in the Europa League. He then ditched 27-year-old successor Kirill Alshevskiy after just two games and recruited former national team captain Sergei Gurenko, who noted: "To be more successful we need more stability."

At the other end of the table, Gomel, Granit and Smorgon were relegated with only Belshina Babruisk being promoted as the top flight is reduced to 12 teams next season.

Oleg Zadernovsky

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
SERGEY KRYVETS (BATE)
The Belarus midfielder played in all 26 league matches, scoring 14 goals and providing nine assists.

LATVIA
End of an era

ALTHOUGH Liepajas Metalurgs relieved Ventspils of the Virsliga for the first time in four years, the big shock of the season involved fourth-place Dinaburg, who were expelled for match fixing.

Club president Oleg Gavrilov and Georgian coach Tamaz Pertia both

Disappointed...Zavettieri

for Levadia

that of their city rivals Levadia, victory in the Cup and Super Cup were of little consolation for the club's fourth-place finish in the league.

Andres Must

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
SANDER PURI (Levadia Tallinn)
Having continued to develop impressively, the 21-year-old midfielder is now considering his next move after informing the champions in August that he did not intend to extend his contract.

Can't catch me...Levadia's Tarmo Neemelo (left) and Margus Korju of Tallinna Kalev

for Ventspils

received life bans. Sadly, this was not the first time the club from Daugavpils has been involved in such a scandal as, in 2007, they were thrown out of the Baltic League.

Meanwhile, German coach Rudiger Abramczik said of Metalurgs' second Latvian title: "We really gave it our all for the whole season. During the campaign we lost some leaders, but young, inexperienced players managed to replace them. Winning a national title is always tough."

Deposed champions Ventspils found it extremely hard going at the end of the season after becoming the first Latvian team to qualify for the group stage of the Europa League (formerly the UEFA Cup).

"We are very disappointed to lose the title but I'm sure other Latvian clubs would be happy to be in our place, playing in the UEFA Europa League group stage," said coach Nunzio Zavettieri.

Andres Must

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
KRISTAPS GREBIS (Liepajas Metalurgs)
The 28-year-old striker scored 30 league goals in what was indisputably the best season of his career.

LITHUANIA
Final day victory

AFTER losing 3-2 at home to surprise package Vetra in May, Ekranas did not lose another league game all season as they successfully defended their crown, pipping the eventual runners-up to the title with a 2-1 victory in the return game on the final day of the campaign.

Valdas Trakys scored both goals to finish the league's top scorer with 20 – nine more than his nearest rivals. He said of his side's defence of the title they won last year: "The most difficult thing this season was that everyone was hanging gold medals around our necks even before the league started."

Sudova, who beat Ekranas in the Super Cup season opener, added the Lithuanian Cup by beating Taurus 1-0 in the Final.

Nikolai Kalvas

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
VALDAS TRAKYS (Ekranas)
The 30-year-old striker had a season to remember, topping the scoring charts with a career-best tally of 20.

Worthy winners...Ekranas

PREMIER LEAGUE - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pyunik	28	20	5	3	64	13	65
Mika	28	18	4	6	59	34	58
Ulisses	28	16	5	7	47	25	53
Banants	28	13	5	10	40	29	44
Gandzasar	28	12	2	14	32	47	38
Shirak	28	5	8	15	24	55	23
Kilikia	28	5	5	18	22	51	20
Ararat	28	2	8	18	20	54	14

PREMIER LEAGUE - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BATE	26	19	5	2	55	16	62
Dinamo Minsk	26	14	8	4	38	18	50
Dnepr	26	12	4	10	31	26	40
Naftan	26	12	2	12	28	39	38
Dinamo Brest	26	10	8	8	30	24	38
Shakhtyor	26	10	8	8	33	28	38
Neman	26	11	4	11	23	31	37
Zhodino	26	10	7	9	31	22	37
Minsk	26	11	3	12	33	26	36
Lok Vitebsk	26	10	2	14	26	37	32
MTZ-RIPO	26	8	6	12	34	38	30
Gomel	26	8	5	13	31	47	29
Granit	26	6	7	13	27	39	25
Smorgon	26	2	9	15	17	46	15

MEISTRILIIGA - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Levadia Tallinn	36	31	4	1	121	23	97
Sillamae Kalev	36	24	4	8	85	40	76
Narva Trans	36	23	7	6	82	29	76
Flora Tallinn	36	22	6	8	79	31	72
Nomme Kaju	36	15	9	12	65	47	54
Tulevik	36	15	6	15	55	49	51
Tammeka	36	7	3	26	29	86	24
Kuressaare	36	7	3	26	21	99	24
Paide LM	36	6	4	26	21	97	22
Tallinna Kalev	36	4	4	28	32	89	16

VIRSLIGA - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liepajas	32	25	4	3	96	23	79
Ventspils	32	23	5	4	89	21	74
Skonto Riga	32	23	4	5	96	30	73
Jurmala	32	12	4	16	42	60	40
RFS/Olimps	32	11	5	16	53	60	38
Blazma	32	7	5	20	30	71	26
Tranzits	32	2	10	20	22	65	16
Daugava Riga	32	3	5	24	26	116	14
Dinaburg	32	15	4	13	31	39	0*

* Dinaburg expelled from the league

A LYGA - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ekranas	28	18	9	1	58	20	63
Vetra	28	16	9	3	55	22	57
Sudova	28	14	11	3	55	22	53
Siauliai	28	13	3	12	40	34	42
Tauras	28	10	8	10	26	22	38
Banga	28	7	6	15	25	49	27
LKKA	28	4	3	21	19	63	15
Kruoja	28	2	7	19	24	70	13

Bowled over...Banfield's players celebrate becoming champions at last

ARGENTINA Banfield end long wait

IN AN UNUSUAL opening tournament, in which the smaller clubs stood out, Banfield from the Greater Buenos Aires suburb of the same name won the first title in their 114-year history.

Newell's Old Boys were second and Colon third, while erratic Independiente and last season's closing champions Velez Sarsfield were the only big clubs in the top six.

With an average of 2.1 goals per game, scoring in the apertura was low. Only Independiente reached the 30-goal mark and almost 70 per cent of matches finished in either draws or with a one-goal margin.

With so many close matches, quite a number of refereeing mistakes decided the outcome of games.

Standards are declining, but perhaps that's not surprising as, at the last count, some 350 Argentinians were playing their football in other countries around the world.

The low standard also enabled veterans such as Boca Juniors' Martin Palermo (aged 36) and River Plate duo Marcelo Gallardo (33) and Matias Almeyda (36) to shine.

In addition, none of the six Argentinian clubs reached the Final of the Sudamericana Cup and neither River Plate nor Boca Juniors qualified for this year's Libertadores Cup. It was the first time since the 1960s that the two leading Buenos Aires clubs had failed to make the continent's premier club competition.

Critics claim that Banfield were pragmatic and never looked like champions – despite going unbeaten for the first 15 games. But then nor did any other team shine. Banfield had a solid defence, which conceded only 11 goals, and fielded a number of players who had not stood out at other clubs.

Banfield had few stars – unless you count Uruguayan striker Santiago Silva, who was the tournament's top scorer with 14 of his side's 25 goals, even though he had never been a prominent scorer at any of his previous clubs.

Banfield's use of two centre-forwards – Silva with compatriot Sebastian Fernandez – backed up by Walter Erviti and Colombian teenager James Rodriguez proved to be a winning formula.

Standards are declining, but perhaps that's not surprising as, at the last count, some 350 Argentinians were playing abroad

The question now is will Banfield suffer the same fate as Huracan in last season's clausura?

Huracan lost a lot of their best players – most of who were only partly owned by the club or on loan – but Banfield coach Julio Falcioni believes his side will avoid a similar fate.

"Ninety per cent of the players are owned by the club and most have contracts for another two seasons," he said. "Not so Silva, who owns part of his contract, but we are negotiating to keep him at least for another six months."

The other revelation of the campaign, and perhaps a bigger surprise, were Rosario club Newell's Old Boys, who finished two points behind Banfield as both clubs lost on the last day.

Newell's were virtually destroyed by a 14-year spell under corrupt president Eduardo Lopez and were taken over by a hooligan gang. With no funds to pay players or sign replacements for those who left, Newell's had to recruit from the lower divisions, but the young team unexpectedly played their hearts out.

And what about the "Big Six" clubs who have won 94 of the 116 professional championships?

Closing championship winners Velez Sarsfield looked like carrying on where they left off last season until they trailed off, suffering the fate of many clubs who find they lack the strength in

Newell boy...Jorge Achucarro (no17) joined Old Boys from Atlas of Mexico

depth to compete in both the league and mid-week cup games.

Boca Juniors were within striking distance of top place at one time, but fell away when midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme was injured and missed the last seven games.

Boca had a long injury list, which was not unexpected given the number of veterans in the team. Goalkeeper Roberto Abbondanzieri also claimed it was difficult to play with coach Alfio Basile's 4-3-1-2 system, explaining: "One or two midfielders go up, only one is left and teams playing 4-4-2 beat us."

There were often rifts between the older and younger players at Boca, but the disagreements between club directors were worse and more harmful. Manager Carlos Bianchi sold key men such as Jesus Datolo and Rodrigo Palacio, who were not replaced. While Basile wants new signings, Bianchi prefers to keep first-team places open for youngsters.

River Plate's poor year was a direct result of continually selling their best players, and even some of their best youngsters. However, transfer fees seemed to disappear into a black hole, leaving debts, and a questionable club committee bought poor replacements.

That could all change as Daniel Passarella, the 1978 World Cup-winning captain and River Plate's former player and coach, was elected president in December.

He found the coffers empty and announced austerity measures such as no pre-season training trips, but no sale of top players. River Plate will buy players if money appears.

San Lorenzo also have a big debt, but the main complaint here is that coach Diego Simeone, who spent a large part of his playing career in Europe, tries to make the team play a more European style and results have been erratic.

Racing Club, recently out of bankruptcy, continue in the relegation zone. Unless they improve greatly in the clausura, they will face the drop. At the beginning of the opening championship, under coach Ricardo Caruso Lombardi, a lot of poor-quality players were added to the squad. Then, by the end of the campaign, under Claudio Vivas (assistant to Marcelo Bielsa when he was national team coach), they caused the upset of the season by ending Banfield's unbeaten record with a 1-0 win. However, Vivas has now put 18 players of the top-heavy playing staff of 44 on the transfer list.

Eric Weil

Setback...Riquelme joins the injury list

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
MATIAS ALMEYDA (River Plate)
Not because the former World Cup midfielder was the best but because, at the age of 36 and four years after retiring from first division football, River plucked him out of their veterans' team to become a star and an inspiration for a poor first team.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
DANIEL "KEKO" VILLALBA (River Plate)
At 17, he has already made several successful first-team appearances for River after playing in the Under-17 World Cup. Manchester United, Chelsea and Roma have all reportedly contacted the club about him.

Comeback...Almeyda

Wave of success...Falcioni celebrates winning the title

COACH OF THE SEASON
JULIO FALCIONI (Banfield)
Got the best out of a team with no stars and, for the first time in Argentina, showed that a former goalkeeper can be a title-winning coach.

OPENING TOURN'T - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Banfield	19	12	5	2	25	11	41
Newell's	19	12	3	4	26	15	39
Colon	19	10	4	5	27	16	34
Independiente	19	10	4	5	30	20	34
Velez	19	10	4	5	29	21	34
Argentinos Jrs	19	8	8	3	29	20	32
San Lorenzo	19	9	5	5	28	20	32
Estudiantes	19	9	4	6	28	19	31
Lanus	19	8	7	4	26	17	31
Rosario	19	8	7	4	21	14	31
Boca Juniors	19	7	6	6	28	24	27
Arsenal	19	7	6	6	20	24	27
At Tucuman	19	6	4	9	24	32	22
River Plate	19	5	6	8	23	26	21
Chacarita Jrs	19	5	4	10	18	25	19
Racing Club	19	4	5	10	17	26	17
Godoy Cruz	19	3	7	9	18	28	16
Gimnasia LP	19	3	4	12	16	29	13
Huracan	19	2	5	12	12	34	11
Tigre	19	2	2	15	18	42	8

Match winner... Fla's Angelim celebrates his goal against Gremio

BRAZIL Last-gasp Flamengo take title

IN THE MOST exciting Brazilian championship since the adoption of the league format in 2003, Flamengo staged a remarkable late rally to claim their first crown for 17 years.

After 21 of the 38 rounds the Rio giants languished in 14th place. But then they caught fire, hit top spot with a round to go and – with 21 minutes remaining – scored the goal that beat Gremio 2-1 to ensure their sixth national title.

Their triumph is the story of the recuperation of centre-forward Adriano (see Headliners, page 18) and of his partnership with the 37-year-old Serbian playmaker, Dejan Petkovic. It is also the tale of how the two of them were housed in a collective structure that worked.

When coach Cuca was sacked after 13 games, Jorge Luis Andrade took temporary charge – or so it seemed at the time. A midfielder in the great Fla side of the 1980s, Andrade has been part of the furniture at the club, working with the youth sides, as assistant coach and occasionally filling in as caretaker boss of the first team. This time he seized his opportunity and in his quiet, low-key way, ripped up the structure of the team.

For two years Flamengo's rearguard was based around the veteran centre-back Fabio Luciano, but he had become like the king in chess – of limited mobility and in need of protection at all costs. So while he operated as the spare man, others were running around doing man-for-man marking jobs to compensate. It was an odd defensive system, but Flamengo retained it even after the 34-year-old retired on the eve of the season.

However, after his appointment, Andrade reverted to a conventional back four, convincing his full-backs Leonardo Mora and Juan that they had to defend as well. The experienced Alvaro was signed from Internacional and formed an effective centre-back partnership with Ronaldo Angelim, while – until he was injured on international duty – the Chile holding midfielder Claudio Maldonado was a splendid re-enforcement. With keeper Bruno on top form, Flamengo became a difficult team to score against – and therefore the occasional moment of inspiration from Petkovic or Adriano was enough to pick up three points.

With a back four – and support striker Ze Roberto dropping deep and rotating positions with Petkovic – Fla's formation was reminiscent of the 4-2-3-1 of the 1980s side as Andrade recreated the shape of the team he played in almost three decades ago.

His team were worthy champions, but they would not have had a view of the title without some help from the Palmeiras and Sao Paulo.

Leaders for half the competition, Palmeiras were obvious favourites – especially when they hired Muricy Ramalho, who coached Sao Paulo to the title in each of the three previous years, and brought striker Vagner Love back from CSKA Moscow. However, in the final straight they looked like a caricature of a Muricy side, unable to exchange three passes and dependent on set-pieces. Astonishingly they even failed to qualify for the Libertadores after finishing fifth.

Flamengo's triumph is the story of the recuperation of centre-forward Adriano and his partnership with Dejan Petkovic

sides that they trailed for so long. Flamengo's points total was by far the lowest of any winner since the introduction of the current format (even allowing for the fact that from 2003 to 2005 there were more clubs and consequently more games).

Teams who had threatened to spring a shock, such as Goias and Atletico Mineiro, collapsed under the pressure; more surprising was the decline of neighbours and rivals

Sao Paulo were not much better. Having replaced Ramalho, coach Ricardo Gomes promised a more expansive game, yet it never came. They suffered from suspensions in the closing weeks and without an effective presence on the right there seemed little point to their traditional three-centre-backs system. They were

Disgraceful...a Coritiba fan is caught up in the violence that followed his side's relegation

top with three rounds to go, but in two successive away games their defence fell apart, taking with it the chance of a fourth consecutive championship.

Until Ronaldo Angelim headed Flamengo's last-day winner against Gremio, the title was on its way to an Internacional side which appeared to have underperformed for much of the season – an analysis confirmed by the replacement of coach Tite by Mario Sergio for the final rounds without noticeable improvement.

Apart from Flamengo, only two other teams managed to sustain form over the second half of the campaign: Cruzeiro, who surged away from the relegation zone to snatch a Libertadores place, and seemingly doomed Fluminense.

Coach Cuca, who joined after being sacked by Flamengo, helped Fluminense to an 11-game unbeaten run after finding an attacking formula to support striker Fred, who returned from injury to give the team a spearhead. A 1-1 draw with Coritiba on the final day ensured safety – and meant their opponents went down, along with Santo Andre and the Recife duo of Nautico and Sport. They will be replaced by Vasco da Gama, Guarani, Ceara and Atletico Goianiense.

SERIE A - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Flamengo	38	19	10	9	58	44	67
Internacional	38	19	8	11	65	44	65
Sao Paulo	38	18	11	9	57	42	65
Cruzeiro	38	18	8	12	58	53	62
Palmeiras	38	17	11	10	58	45	62
Avai	38	15	12	11	61	52	57
Atl Mineiro	38	16	8	14	55	56	56
Gremio	38	15	10	13	67	46	55
Goias	38	15	10	13	64	65	55
Corinthians	38	14	10	14	50	54	52
Barueri	38	12	13	13	59	52	49
Santos	38	12	13	13	58	58	49
Vitoria	38	13	9	16	51	57	48
Atl Paranaense	38	13	9	16	42	49	48
Botafogo	38	11	14	13	52	56	47
Fluminense	38	11	13	14	49	56	46
Coritiba	38	12	9	17	48	60	45
Santo Andre	38	11	8	19	46	61	41
Nautico	38	10	8	20	48	71	38
Sport Recife	38	7	10	21	48	71	31

Second best...Internacional's Giuliano (left)

A full-scale riot by Coritiba fans following their relegation left a bitter taste and the performance of some of the big clubs was a disappointment, but there was still plenty to applaud in the 2009 Brazilian championship.

Unfancied clubs like Avai and Barueri were welcome surprises, while there were good signs on an individual level too. The current strength of the Brazilian currency makes it easier to bring back high-profile players from Europe, and the tournament can always be relied upon to throw up new talents. This year revealed the Santos pair of Neymar and Paulo Henrique Ganso, Fernandinho and Thiago Humberto of Barueri, and Maicon of Fluminense, all proved to be promising creative players. Airton of Flamengo is an interesting midfielder, while a good impression was left by centre-backs Dalton of Fluminense and Rafael Toloi of Goais.

But the biggest legacy of the season was the consolidation of the league format. The calendar is still far from perfect, but average attendances were up to almost 18,000 and a push by the all-powerful TV Globo for a return to the previous play-off system would seem to have been rebuffed. Part of Globo's campaign was the argument that under the league format the title would never leave the city of Sao Paulo.

However, that line of thought was well and truly put to rest with Flamengo's dramatic last-day win.

Tim Vickery

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
DEJAN PETKOVIC (Flamengo)
A club idol who was brought back during the campaign apparently as part of the negotiations about the money owed to him in his previous spell. Although he was not thought likely to make much of a contribution on the field, he ended up as the most influential player in the last two months of the season. Gifted and intelligent, his playmaking was vital. He was just about to be substituted (his number board was up) when he stayed on the pitch to take the corner from which Ronaldo Angelim headed the title-winning goal against Gremio.

Triumphant return...Petkovic

COACH OF THE SEASON
JORGE LUIS ANDRADE (Flamengo)
Former Flamengo midfielder who took over as coach previously on a caretaker basis during the national championships of 2004 and 2005. This time, though, he did it so well that his career has changed. There is no way he can go back to being an assistant after his work in 2009. Low key and not apparently over-articulate, he changed the tactical structure of the team and maintained a good atmosphere in the pressure-cooker surroundings of the country's most popular club. His success is a real boost in the struggle for black coaches to have more opportunities in Brazil.

No going back...Andrade

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
NEYMAR (Santos)
Hype has surrounded him since he was 13 and in 2009, aged 17, he was finally handed his debut. And he did not disappoint. Possessing vision, audacity and rare talent, his total of 10 goals was thoroughly satisfactory, especially as he missed a few rounds through his participation in Brazil's disastrous Under-17 World Cup campaign. It was, perhaps, a good season in which to take his first steps, with Santos in mid-table and the pressure off. The demands will be greater in 2010, with Pele concerned that the youngster is being paid too much, too soon.

Bright start...Neymar

AMERICAS Home advantage helps LDU to yet another high

SUDAMERICANA CUP

IN JULY 2008, LDU Quito of Ecuador overcame Fluminense of Brazil to win their first-ever Libertadores Cup – and 17 months later, against the same opposition and in a similar manner, they won the continent's second-most important club prize.

Known more informally as Liga de Quito, LDU have now established themselves as regional heavyweights, a process that was given a huge kick-start in 1997 when they inaugurated their impressive Casa Blanca stadium – the scene of some crushing victories in this campaign.

Being situated some 2,800 metres above sea level gives LDU an undeniable home advantage against unacclimatised opposition, though much depends on the intelligence of the visiting team.

Off...Fred (left) gets his marching orders

Quarter-final visitors Velez Sarsfield are coached by Ricardo Gareca, who has considerable experience of the conditions, and without a slack piece of marking at a set-piece the Argentinian side may not have gone down 2-1 in Quito, and 3-2 on aggregate. Gareca ensured his team did the key thing for visitors at altitude: stay compact. Uruguay's River Plate, an attack-minded team who took an understrength side to Ecuador, did not and went down 7-0 in their semi-final.

Fluminense made the same mistake in the first leg of the Final, when they were beaten 5-1 despite taking the lead after 23 seconds.

Happy in defeat...LDU lost 3-0 in Brazil, but beat Fluminense 5-4 on aggregate

The Rio side's coach Cuca, who plotted a remarkable escape from what had seemed certain relegation to the Brazilian second division, settled on a bold 3-5-2 formation in which both wing-backs were thrown forward. However, at altitude, it left too much space behind them and LDU took full advantage. Star midfielder Edison Mendez helped himself to a superb hat-trick, set up substitute Franklin Salas for the fourth and the veteran Ulises De la Cruz completed the rout with a long-range special in injury time.

That fifth goal started to look increasingly important when De la Cruz was harshly sent off early in the second leg. Fluminense had already pulled one goal back – a deflected shot from midfielder Diguinho – and, with a big crowd in the Maracana believing in miracles, Flu turned the screw.

There were more goals either side of half-time, a guided finish from captain and inspirational centre-forward Fred, and defender Gum's header from a corner.

In the 2008 Libertadores Final, Fluminense had hauled back a first-leg lead only to lose on penalties and now they had 15 minutes to find another goal and force extra time. But LDU took the rhythm out of the game and Fluminense lost their heads – especially Fred, who was sent off by referee Carlos Amarilla. With him went Flu's chances, even though LDU finished with nine men after Jairo Campos also saw red as the trophy went to Ecuador for the first time in its eight-year history.

Tim Vickery

Being 2,800 metres above seas level gives LDU a big home advantage, though much depends on the intelligence of the visitors

Done it again...it is another continental trophy for LDU

CHILE Colo Colo claim 29th title

THE clausura was a championship about two Argentinian coaches in the thick of it and two Uruguayan trainers on the fringes.

Jose Basualdo, who played for Argentina at the 1990 and 1994 World Cups, impressed by steering modest Santiago Morning to their first apertura knockout phase in the first half of the year and earn himself a job with Universidad de Chile.

His predecessor, Uruguayan coach Sergio Markarian, had decided before the end of the opening championship that he was going to quit when it was over due to differences with the club's board. His team won the title, but he stuck to his guns and left.

Basualdo, 46, stepped in and began well, but things were to turn bad for him mid-championship.

Meanwhile, former Argentina Under-20s coach Hugo Tocalli took charge at Colo Colo.

His promising start of two wins and a draw was short-lived as his team picked up a mere 13 points in their opening 11 matches. Despite fan unrest, the board backed Tocalli until the end of the year and he began to turn the Chieftain's fortunes around.

The turning point came in early October when Tocalli's Colo Colo beat Basualdo's Universidad de Chile, their arch-rivals, 1-0 in the Santiago derby, with a goal from Esteban Paredes, whose cross aimed at fellow striker Ezequiel Miralles curled into the net.

Colo Colo, Chile's most successful club, went on to complete a five-match winning streak and qualify for the play-offs. In the Final they beat Universidad Catolica 6-4 on aggregate after a 4-2 away victory.

It was their 29th league title and third clausura in a row, while apertura champions Universidad de Chile missed out on the play-offs for the first time.

"The U" failed to win any of their last eight league matches and the board accepted Basualdo's resignation four months after his appointment.

Basualdo could have bought some time if he had been successful in the Sudamericana Cup, but Universidad de Chile lost to Brazil's Fluminense in the quarter-finals during the same dip in their league form.

Rex Gower

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Catolica	17	11	5	1	43	13	38
Dep La Serena	17	11	0	6	31	19	33
Audax Italiano	17	9	5	3	26	22	32
Colo Colo	17	8	4	5	28	19	28
U Concepcion	17	8	3	6	23	22	27
S Morning	17	8	2	7	22	25	26
U Espanola	17	7	4	6	30	30	25
Everton	17	7	4	6	19	20	25
Rangers	17	7	3	7	26	27	24
Univ de Chile	17	5	6	6	23	24	21
Cobresal	17	5	5	7	18	17	20
Palestino	17	5	5	7	16	20	20
Cobreloa	17	6	1	10	21	22	19
Nublense	17	5	4	8	16	22	19
O'Higgins	17	4	7	6	17	23	19
Huachipato	17	5	2	10	20	29	17
Curico Unido*	17	4	8	5	15	25	17
Municipal	17	1	6	10	21	38	9

*3pts deducted for using an ineligible player

Quarter-finals
Everton v Univ Catolica
0-2, 0-0 (agg 0-2)
Santiago Morning v Audax Italiano
4-2, 1-2 (agg 5-4)
Union Espanola v Dep La Serena
1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3)
Univ de Concepcion v Colo Colo
1-2, 3-4 (agg 4-6)

Semi-finals
Colo Colo v Dep La Serena
1-0, 3-0 (agg 4-0)
Santiago Morning v Univ Catolica
0-3, 3-5 (agg 3-8)

Final
Colo Colo v Univ Catolica
2-2, 4-2 (agg 6-4)

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
EZEQUIEL MIRALLES (Colo Colo)
The Argentinian striker finished the championship as his club's top scorer with 11 goals. Signed from Everton of Chile in July, he ably filled the gap left by compatriot Lucas Barrios, who moved to Borussia Dortmund.

COACH OF THE SEASON
HUGO TOCALLI (Colo Colo)
The 61-year-old former goalkeeper joined from Velez Sarsfield in May and made a shaky start before finishing strongly and lifting the clausura title. Made his name coaching Argentina's national junior teams, steering his country to victory in the 2007 World Youth Cup.

COLOMBIA Debut success for Alvarez

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP - REGULAR - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind Medellin	18	12	2	4	29	18	38
Ind Santa Fe	18	8	6	4	31	24	30
At Huila	18	8	6	4	27	24	30
Pereira	18	7	8	3	21	9	29
Tolima	18	8	5	5	25	23	29
At Junior	18	8	3	7	35	25	27
At Nacional	18	6	9	3	21	19	27
Cartagena	18	7	6	5	30	30	27
Millonarios	18	6	8	4	24	20	26
Dep Pasto	18	7	5	6	24	25	26
Chico	18	6	6	6	32	31	24
Dep Cali	18	6	4	8	30	32	22
Quindio	18	5	3	9	22	31	21
Cucuta	18	4	6	8	16	17	18
La Equidad	18	2	11	5	17	24	17
Once Caldas	18	4	5	9	23	35	17
America	18	1	10	7	20	29	13
Envigado	18	1	7	10	32	43	10

CLOSING PLAY-OFFS - GROUP A - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind Medellin	6	4	2	0	12	6	14
At Junior	6	2	3	1	7	5	9
Pereira	6	1	2	3	9	11	5
Cartagena	6	1	1	4	5	11	4

CLOSING PLAY-OFFS - GROUP B - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Huila	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
At Nacional	6	3	1	2	10	7	10
Ind Santa Fe	6	2	1	3	6	11	7
Tolima	6	1	2	3	9	10	5

Final
At Huila v Indep Medellin
0-1, 2-2 (agg 2-3)

Play-off kings...Independiente Medellin

HAVING finished top of the table in the closing championship, Independiente Medellin confirmed their form of the first phase, becoming the only unbeaten team in the group stage, before beating Atletico Huila 3-2 on aggregate in the Final.

Jackson Martinez, who scored almost half his side's goals, gave Medellin a 1-0 win in the away leg and then scored again as they drew 2-2 in the return to hand coach Leonel Alvarez the title in his debut championship.

The 44-year-old Alvarez, who had been a ball-winning midfielder in the great Colombia side of the 1990s, had worked as an assistant in his previous jobs since early 2007, and he infused his team with his work ethic – not least in Martinez, who would not shy away from defensive duties when necessary.

"Work, work, work. There is no other way of being successful in football and in any activity in life," said Alvarez.

Martinez's 18 goals in 26 matches is a championship record since the Colombian season was divided in 2002 into two separate tournaments and surpasses the 17 scored by Leider Preciado for Deportivo Cali in the Clausura of 2003.

His form earned him his first four international caps in Colombia's final four World Cup qualifiers. But though the 23-year-old scored in his first three matches, it was not enough to see the national team through to the finals in South Africa.

Another striker to make headlines during the tournament was 46-year-old former Colombia striker Anthony De Avila, who made a top-flight comeback for America, having retired from the game 10 years earlier.

The diminutive De Avila, who is just 5ft 2in tall and known as "Smurf", made his return in August as a substitute against Pasto.

In September, Atletico Huila suffered the loss of teenage striker Herman Cordoba, who scored seven goals in 10 matches, and 23-year-old midfielder Mario Beltran, who both died in a car crash when their vehicle caught fire after colliding with a bus as they were out celebrating a league win.

Rex Gower

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
JACKSON MARTINEZ
(Independiente Medellin)
His championship-inspiring form attracted the interest of Mexico's America, Racing Club of Argentina and England's Wigan Athletic, where compatriot Hugo Rodallega plays his club football.

COACH OF THE SEASON
LEONEL ALVAREZ
(Independiente Medellin)
Steered Medellin to the clausura title after taking over in May. His work shone through in the tournament and there is talk of him getting the national team job.

ECUADOR Deportivo Quito triumph

THE championship was as much about Barcelona of Guayaquil – the country's most popular and successful club – fighting to avoid relegation for the first time, as it was about the successes of the Quito clubs: Deportivo on the home front and LDU internationally.

Barcelona finished the second phase, in which the 12 teams in the top flight are divided into two groups of six, in fourth place in Group One, and so failed to make it to the third stage, in which eight teams were divided into two groups. They ended up in 10th place, their worst ever finish.

Neither Barcelona nor El Nacional, who have 13 league titles apiece, made it to the third stage. Having avoided relegation they were idle on the pitch but with time to plan for the future.

The period between 1987 and 1998, when Barcelona won the league five times, has been followed by 12 barren years. Carlos Alfaro Moreno, a former idol at the club, said: "Barcelona have to start again from scratch. The only thing that's left at Barcelona is the name, their great history, their stadium and their fans."

Deportivo Quito retained their title, beating Deportivo Cuenca 4-3 on aggregate in the Final after a 3-2 victory in the second leg. In the decider, substitute Daniel Mina put Quito ahead in the 69th minute and Michael Arroyo increased the lead four minutes later, just after Cuenca midfielder Holguer Matamoros had been shown the red card.

Cuenca then got back on level terms in the space of three minutes with goals by Edison Preciado and Ismael Villalba, before Arroyo struck the winner with three minutes remaining.

LDU, surprise winners of the Libertadores Cup and runners-up at the Club World Cup in 2008, won another two South American trophies. They beat Sudamericana Cup holders Internacional in the Super Cup, and Fluminense 5-4 on aggregate in the 2009 Sudamericana Final.

Rex Gowar

2ND STAGE - GROUP 1 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU Quito	12	6	4	2	18	10	22
Dep Cuenca	12	4	6	2	13	11	18
El Nacional	12	4	3	5	17	11	15
Barcelona	12	3	6	3	14	16	15
Macara	12	2	6	4	11	12	12
LDU P'viejo	12	3	2	7	8	20	11

2ND STAGE - GROUP 2 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dep Quito	12	7	2	3	14	8	23
Manta	12	6	3	3	17	13	21
Emelec	12	5	3	4	17	12	18
Olmedo	12	4	6	2	14	12	18
Espoli	12	4	1	7	13	20	13
Technico Univ	12	1	4	7	13	24	7

3RD STAGE - GROUP 1 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dep Quito	6	4	2	0	8	0	15
LDU Quito	6	1	3	2	4	2	9
Macara	6	1	3	2	2	3	7
Manta	6	1	2	3	1	10	5

3RD STAGE - GROUP 2 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dep Cuenca	6	5	1	0	8	3	16
Emelec	6	1	3	2	4	6	9
Olmedo	6	2	1	3	8	8	7
Espoli	6	0	3	3	3	6	3

Final
Dep Cuenca v Dep Quito
1-1, 2-3 (agg 3-4)

Final clash...Cuenca (in red) and Quito

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
CLAUDIO BIELER
(LDU Quito)
The Argentinian striker was the league's top scorer with 22 goals and has been a key figure in all the success the club have enjoyed over the last two years.

COACH OF THE SEASON
JORGE FOSSATI
(LDU Quito)
The Uruguayan carried on the work of predecessor Edgardo Bauza to bring the club two more international trophies and earned himself a lucrative job with Brazil's Internacional for next year.

PARAGUAY Nacional end long wait

LIBERTAD may have been the team of the decade in Paraguay with six titles, but Nacional pipped them to the post in the closing championship to win their first crown for 63 years.

Ever Almeida's team made hard work of it over the final stretch though, losing their penultimate game to Libertad and ending up grateful for their rivals' 1-0 defeat by Tacuary on the last day of the season.

Libertad's 2-1 win over Nacional put the two teams level on points and with everything to play for on the final day. Nacional, known as "The Academy", held Olimpia 0-0 in a match they dominated to finish a point clear. They were rewarded for their attacking game, in which coach Almeida successfully mixed youth and experience under 35-year-old defender Denis Caniza, who will captain Paraguay at this summer's World Cup finals – his fourth in a row.

Nacional now go into this year's Libertadores Cup, along with opening champions Cerro Porteno, who finished sixth in the clausura while focusing on the Sudamericana Cup.

As the team with most points overall in the year, Libertad will join those two in the group stage if they get past Venezuelan opening champions Deportivo Tachira in the preliminary knockout round.

The country's most successful club side, Olimpia, had an indifferent year. Their derby against Cerro Porteno early in the championship was marred by crowd violence and five red cards. Olimpia finished with eight men and a 1-0 defeat, courtesy of an own goal by Dario Caballero – who had begun the afternoon being hit by an object thrown from the crowd that left him with a head wound and delayed the kick-off.

Both coaches, Cerro's Pedro Troglio and Olimpia's Carlos Kiese, were also sent off. Kiese resigned four matches from the end of the season and was replaced by Jose Cardozo.

Rex Gowar

Tough at the top... Libertad's Victor Caceres (left) and Nacional's Heber Arriola

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional	22	12	5	5	29	16	41
Libertad	22	12	4	6	31	20	40
Guarani	22	11	5	6	30	21	38
Rubio Nu	22	10	7	5	29	22	37
Olimpia	22	11	2	9	32	22	35
Cerro Porteno	22	8	8	6	28	26	33
Tacuary	22	9	5	8	25	31	32
3 de Febrero	22	7	5	10	24	35	26
Sol America	22	7	4	11	25	30	25
2 de Mayo	22	6	4	12	25	27	22
5 Luqueno	22	5	5	12	19	32	20
12 de Octubre	22	5	2	15	17	33	17

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
PABLO VELAZQUEZ
(Rubio Nu)
Tall 22-year-old striker who had an impressive year on loan with promoted Rubio Nu from Libertad. He was top scorer in the opening championship with 15 goals, then helped his team to a surprise fourth place in the closing tournament.

COACH OF THE SEASON
EVER ALMEIDA
(Nacional)
The 61-year-old, Uruguay-born former goalkeeper won a string of titles playing for Olimpia, including the Libertadores Cup in 1979 and 1990. He took charge of Nacional last July after a year with Olimpia.

PERU Solano leads the way

GROUP A - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Alianza Lima	44	22	10	12	59	46	76
Juan Aurich	44	20	14	10	61	44	74
Cesar Vallejo	44	17	16	11	60	51	67
Intl Gas	44	18	10	16	56	51	64
S Cristal	44	16	9	19	71	55	57
Jose Galvez	44	15	7	22	43	59	52
Col Nacional	44	14	8	22	39	58	50
Sport Ancash	44	13	9	22	40	61	48

GROUP B - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Universitario	44	23	12	9	59	32	81
Huancayo	44	21	7	16	64	57	70
Univ SMP*	44	18	16	10	64	45	69
Melgar	44	15	13	16	59	62	58
Cienciano	44	14	16	14	56	63	58
Total Chilaco	44	12	15	17	62	64	51
Al Atletico	44	12	13	19	44	58	49
C Belaunde	44	7	15	22	42	76	36

*1pt deducted

Final

Alianza Lima v Universitario
(1-1, (1-1 (agg 0-2)

ONE name stood out in the 2009 championship: Nolberto Solano – and not entirely because of his footballing qualities, but also as a spokesman for the players in their conflicts with the country's football authorities.

Solano had spent more than a decade abroad, with Diego Maradona's Boca Juniors, and then in England, largely with Newcastle United, before returning home last January.

He led Universitario to the title in one of the few championships in South America that produces a single winner at the end of the year, having abandoned the apertura-clausura system – even if it goes through a mutation in mid-season.

Universitario were second by one point to Juan Aurich in the first stage. They then won their group, 11 points clear of Sport Huancayo, when the teams were divided into two pools of eight. The pool winners went into the two-leg final with Alianza Lima taking the other berth. Solano scored the deciding goal, a penalty for a 1-0 victory in the away leg, after Universitario had also won the first game 1-0.

With players challenging the federation over organisational issues, football's problems continued as the national team finished bottom of their World Cup qualifying group. It was a sad end for the international career of Solano, 35, who has not been able to play in a World Cup for his homeland.

Rex Gowar

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
NOLBERTO SOLANO
(Universitario)
His leadership qualities and form kept him in the running for a midfield place for Peru and the captaincy in the absence of some quality players in exile.

COACH OF THE SEASON
JUAN REYNOSO
(Universitario)
The 40-year-old former Peru defender and captain added the title as coach to the one he won with the same club as a player in 1993.

URUGUAY Coach off to winning start

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional*	15	13	0	2	36	11	36
Liverpool	15	8	5	2	31	14	29
Defensor	15	8	5	2	28	16	29
Wanderers	15	7	5	3	24	13	26
Penarol	15	7	5	3	28	19	26
Rampla Jrs	15	7	3	5	18	19	24
Danubio	15	7	2	6	28	25	23
River Plate	15	6	5	4	24	23	23
Racing	15	5	5	5	25	22	20
Cerrito	15	4	6	5	20	21	18
Cerro Largo	15	4	4	7	15	18	16
Tacuarembo	15	5	1	9	12	24	16
C Espanol	15	2	6	7	13	28	12
Cerro	15	2	5	8	18	31	11
Atenas	15	3	2	10	9	32	11
Fenix	15	1	3	11	10	26	6

*3pts deducted

Victors...Nacional players celebrate

DESPITE the handicap of a three-point deduction at the start of the opening championship, last season's overall champions Nacional won the apertura title with a seven-point margin under Eduardo Acevedo. The 50-year-old was a central defender in Uruguay's 1986 World Cup team and had no previous experience as head coach.

Having been penalised for acts of violence by supporters at a match with Danubio in November 2008, Nacional made a bright start to the latest campaign. They won 3-0 away to Defensor Sporting, the most successful team in 2008, and lost just twice – to River Plate and Wanderers.

Nacional also hammered arch-rivals Penarol 3-0 in the big Montevideo derby.

Midfield creator Nicolas Lodeiro was Nacional's top scorer with seven of their 36 goals, while Sergio Blanco and Gustavo Varela scored four each.

Mauren Franco of Cerrito and Liverpool's Emiliano Alfaro topped the scoring chart with 13 goals each.

Liverpool and Defensor finished joint second in the table with almost identical records.

Rex Gowar

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
NICOLAS LODEIRO
(Nacional)
The 20-year-old had a good year, captaining Uruguay in the World Youth Cup, winning a senior cap in the 2010 World Cup play-offs against Costa Rica and forging a fine midfield partnership with the Argentinian, Angel Morales.

COACH OF THE SEASON
JUAN RAMON CARRASCO
(River Plate)
Led the modest Montevideo side to the Sudamericana Cup semi-finals, giving public team talks on the side of the pitch.

VENEZUELA Three-way title finish

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tachira	17	11	4	2	25	7	37
Italia	17	11	3	3	26	14	36
Caracas	17	11	2	4	35	14	35
Lara	17	8	6	3	23	13	30
Trujillanos	17	8	4	5	31	21	28
Anzoategui	17	8	2	7	22	19	26
Mineros	17	7	4	6	22	21	25
Zulia	17	7	3	7	27	29	24
Estudiantes	17	5	8	4	21	15	23
El Vigia	17	7	2	8	26	31	23
Zamora	17	6	4	7	19	27	22
Monagas	17	6	3	8	32	32	21
Yaracuyanos	17	6	3	8	20	29	21
Aragua	17	4	7	6	11	18	19
Esppor	17	4	5	8	12	21	17
Centro Italo	17	3	5	9	19	28	14
Carabobo	17	2	7	8	16	29	13
Llaneros	17	1	4	12	18	39	7

THE opening championship was settled on the final day and won by Deportivo Tachira, who were in third place before kick-off. The three teams who have dominated the league in recent years all went into the decisive final round of matches with a chance of lifting the title.

Tachira beat Centro Italo 1-0, while Caracas – the 2008-09 champions – lost 2-0 to Anzoategui, and top-of-the-table Deportivo Italia lost 1-0 at home to fourth-placed Lara.

Daniel Arismendi was Tachira's top marksman with nine goals, while the key to their success was their form at home, where they were unbeaten.

The Venezuelan league is still the poor neighbour of South America's soccer scene, but progress at international level – qualification for the World Cup was within the national team's grasp until the final two qualifiers – indicates an improvement domestically; as did Caracas becoming the first Venezuelan team to reach the quarter-finals of the Libertadores Cup.

However, crowds remain thin as baseball is still the favourite sport.

Rex Gowar

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
HEATKLIF CASTILLO
(Monagas)
The 30-year-old was the top scorer with 12 goals.

COACH OF THE SEASON
NOEL SANVICENTE
(Caracas)
Did not win the apertura but the 2008-09 title was his fifth championship and reached the Libertadores quarter-finals.

JAPAN Antlers make it three in a row

KASHIMA ANTLERS staked their claim to be J.League's best team of all time by winning an unprecedented third title in a row. And again they let the championship race continue to the very last day.

Kawasaki Frontale once more had to make do with the supporting role – they finished runners-up for the third time in four years – and it clearly hurt.

The observation that Frontale will crack under pressure was confirmed by their 2-0 defeat to Tokyo in the League Cup Final, by their failure against mid-table Nagoya Grampus in the quarter-finals of the Asian Champions League and by their defeat to J2 champions Vegalta Sendai in the Emperor's Cup quarter-finals. A season that had promised so much produced nothing for a club that has yet to win anything aside from J2 (twice) and manager Takashi Sekizuka left at the end of the season after turning down the offer of a new contract.

Captain fantastic...Antlers' Ogasawara lifts the championship trophy

On the up...Ogasawara (left)

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
MITSUO OGASAWARA
(Kashima Antlers)
Led Antlers to a record third straight championship – but can the J.League's Player of the Year also make it to his third World Cup? He has not played for Japan since 2006.

COACH OF THE SEASON
OSWALDO OLIVEIRA
(Kashima Antlers)
Made J.League history by winning his third championship in only his third year in Japan.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
GENKI HARAGUCHI
(Urawa Red Diamonds)
Only Yuki Abe and Edmilson played more league games for Reds last season than this teenager, who made a strong impact not only in midfield but as an auxiliary striker as well.

It was not as though Antlers did not slip too, though. They roared to the title with five straight wins at the finish but were on a run of five straight losses and a draw before that. However, Antlers were better than ever in the first half of the year, racing to eight consecutive wins in an unbeaten run of 17 league games. But, by October, Shimizu S-Pulse had gone top for the first time in a decade. Frontale then took over and recorded their biggest ever league win – 7-0 at home to fellow challengers Sanfrecce Hiroshima – only to crumble soon after to strugglers Oita Trinita.

At the end of the drama, it was Antlers as usual. The crucial match was the second to last game at home to resurgent Gamba Osaka, who had trailed Antlers by 19 points in mid-season but now stood to rise above them on goal difference if they won. Antlers duly crushed Gamba 5-1 and carried on to secure their historic seventh championship with a 1-0 win against Urawa Red Diamonds in a packed Saitama Stadium.

Why do Antlers do it this way? "We don't do it to make the league more interesting," says Antlers manager Oswaldo Oliveira. "We always fight to win and it's not just our loss of form, you have to give credit to the other teams who work to block our strengths."

Oliveira suggests that the J. League's near universal inconsistency is due to the fact that there is so little difference between the teams, week after week, and also the crowded schedule. How did Antlers recover to win yet again? "By not giving up," said Oliveira. "And Ogasawara."

> "The fact that the league had its first all-Japanese Best XI may not be wholly unrelated to financial strains"

Antlers captain Mitsuo Ogasawara may be out of favour with national team manager Takeshi Okada but he again made a huge mark in the league. "It would be a tragedy if Ogasawara watches this year's World Cup on TV," says Oliveira. "There are many fine players in the national team, but none as good as Ogasawara."

Ryoichi Maeda of Jubilo Iwata finished as top scorer with 20 goals, while Kazuma Watanabe of Yokohama F-Marinos set a new record of 13 goals in his debut year – beating Shoji Jo's 12 goals in 1994.

There were also spectacular debut seasons for defensive midfielder Takuji Yonemoto of Tokyo, who won the man of the match award in the League Cup Final, and Urawa Reds' teenage prodigy Naoki Yamada, who made his Japan debut before his season was disrupted by injury. Jubilo Iwata striker Masashi Nakayama set a seniority record with an appearance from the bench at the age of 42 years, two months and five days. He has now left Iwata this season but still plans to find another team.

The J.League's rapid expansion continues with the addition of one new team next season, Giravanz Kitakyushu, bringing the two divisions' total to thirty seven. The anticipated financial strains, however, also surfaced as sponsorship revenues fell in the wake of the global financial crisis. Oita Trinita had to be rescued by a huge loan from the league and Tokyo Verdy were on the brink of expulsion before sufficient sponsorship revenue was secured at the 11th hour.

The fact that the league had its first all-Japanese Best XI and its first Japanese top scorer since Naohiro Takahara in 2002, may not be wholly unrelated to those funding strains.

Mike Plastow

J.LEAGUE - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kashima Antlers	34	20	6	8	51	30	66
Kawasaki Frontale	34	19	7	8	64	40	64
Gamba Osaka	34	16	6	10	62	44	60
Sanfrecce Hiroshima	34	15	11	8	53	44	56
Tokyo	34	16	5	13	47	39	53
Urawa Red Diamonds	34	15	4	14	43	43	52
Shimizu S-Pulse	34	13	12	9	44	41	51
Albirex Niigata	34	13	11	10	42	31	50
Nagoya Grampus	34	14	8	12	46	42	50
Yokohama F-Marinos	34	11	13	10	43	37	46
Jubilo Iwata	34	11	8	15	50	60	41
Kyoto Sanga	34	11	8	15	35	47	41
Omiya Ardija	34	9	12	13	40	47	39
Vissel Kobe	34	10	9	15	40	48	39
Montedio Yamagata	34	10	8	15	32	40	38
Kashiwa Reysol	34	7	13	14	41	57	34
Oita Trinita	34	8	6	20	26	45	30
JEF United Chiba	34	5	12	17	32	56	27

PEOPLE in the news

Scotland turn to Levein

National job...Levein

EUROPE

Former Scotland international CRAIG LEVEIN left his position as manager of Dundee United to become his country's new national team boss. The 45-year-old, who won 16 caps as a defender, replaced GEORGE BURLEY, who was sacked in November after winning just three out of his 14 games in charge.

Mexican coach HUGO SANCHEZ and assistant SERGIO EGEA were sacked by Almeria after the Spanish side lost 2-0 at Espanyol. JUAN MANUEL LILLO is the new boss.

Belgium national team coach DICK ADVOCAAT agreed to combine the job with leading last season's Dutch champions AZ Alkmaar until the end of the current campaign, taking over the post from RONALD KOEMAN.

MIROSLAV BLAZEVIC resigned as national coach of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The 74-year-old, who led Croatia to third place in the 1998 World Cup, was expected to join Chinese side Shanghai Shenhua. He was replaced by former Yugoslavia and Paris Saint-Germain playmaker SAFET SUSIC.

Former Liverpool midfielder PATRIK BERGER became the last of the Czech Republic's Euro 96 runners-up to retire. The 36-year-old, who scored from the penalty spot in the Final against Germany, managed 18 goals in 44 appearances for his country during a career that also took in Slavia Prague, Borussia Dortmund, Portsmouth, Aston Villa, Stoke City (on loan) and Sparta Prague.

Zenit St Petersburg appointed LUCIANO SPALLETTI as their new coach. The 50-year-old Italian, who was previously in charge at Roma, took over from caretaker ANATOLI DAVYDOV, who led Zenit to third place in the Russian Premier League last year.

Ukraine have not renewed coach OLEXIY MYKHAYLYCHENKO's contract after the national team failed to qualify for this summer's World Cup finals in South Africa.

Saint-Etienne dismissed ALAIN PERRIN after a 3-0 defeat by Paris Saint-Germain. The 53-year-old – who was also the boss at Marseille, Portsmouth, Sochaux and Lyon – had been in charge for 13 months. CHRISTOPHE GALTIER was named as caretaker coach.

Juventus appointed former player and vice-president ROBERTO BETTEGA as deputy director general to act as a bridge between coach CIRO FERRARA and new president JEAN CLAUDE BLANC. Bettega quit as a director after a match-fixing scandal, though he was not implicated in any wrongdoing.

Former Real Zaragoza midfielder NAYIM, who scored a dramatic winning goal from the halfway line against Arsenal in the 1995 European Cup-winners Cup Final, returned to the club as assistant to coach JOSE AURELIO GAY.

West Ham United's former England striker DEAN ASHTON announced his retirement from the game at the age of 26 after failing to recover from a long-term ankle injury.

DIETER HOENESS, the younger brother of Bayern Munich president ULI HOENESS, was appointed managing director of reigning Bundesliga champions Wolfsburg.

Portuguese coach PAULO DUARTE was sacked by Le Mans, but remains in charge of the Burkina Faso national side.

Italy striker LUCA TONI joined Roma on loan for the remainder of the season after falling out with Bayern Munich coach LOUIS VAN GAAL in Germany.

Former Manchester United player ALBERT SCANLON, one of the survivors of the Munich air disaster in 1954, died at the age of 74 after being unwell for some time.

Red hero...Scanlon

AMERICAS

Mexican side San Luis replaced Argentinian coach MIGUEL ANGEL LOPEZ with IGNACIO AMBRIZ, who was assistant at Spanish teams Osasuna and Atletico Madrid, and with Mexico at the 2002 World Cup.

In charge...Ambriz

AFRICA

AMARA TRAORE, who was a member of Senegal's 2002 World Cup finals squad, was appointed coach of the national team. The 44-year-old led ASC Linguere to the Senegalese league title in 2009.

ASIA

Asian champions Pohang Steelers of South Korea named WALDEMAR OLIVEIRA as successor to SERGIO FARIAS, who joined Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli. The 55-year-old is the younger brother of Kashima Antlers boss OSWALDO DE OLIVEIRA.

Last year's Asian Champions League semi-finalists Seoul appointed former Saudi Arabia and Jordan coach NELO VINGADA to replace SENOL GUNES, who joined Turkish club Trabzonspor.

Chinese Super League side Shandong Luneng appointed Croatian coach BRANKO IVANKOVIC following the departure of LJUBISA TUMBAKOVIC.

AFC Cup champions Kuwait SC agreed terms with Brazilian coach ARTHUR BERNARDES to take charge of the team for the remainder of the season. The 54-year-old replaced caretaker boss MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH.

Iran legend ALI DAEI was appointed coach of Persepolis after they sacked ZLATKO KRANCJAR. Daei led Saipa to the Iranian league title and the knockout stage of the Asian Champions League in his first coaching assignment before taking charge of the national team in early 2008.

Legend...Daei

UAE club Al Shabab appointed PAULO BONAMIGO after sacking ABDULWAHEB ABDULQADER as coach.

Uzbek club Pakhtakor appointed MIODRAG RADULOVIC as their new coach. The 42-year-old, who has coached Montenegro's under-19s and been assistant coach to the Montenegro national team, took over from VIKTOR DJALILOV.

NEW ZEALAND

Reigning Kiwi champs create history

Auckland City won the opening match of the Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi. They beat Al Ahli of the UAE 2-0 in the preliminary round of the competition to qualify for the quarter-finals and become the first side from New Zealand ever to win a game at FIFA's premier club tournament.

Spot on...Butt

ENGLAND

Reds' new Italian and Arsenal young Guns

Liverpool had already been consigned to drop out of the Champions League and into the Europa League knockout stages before their 2-1 home defeat by Fiorentina.

However, there was some good news at Anfield as Albe to Aquilani's appearance against the Italian side meant he was starting a game for the first time since his £20million move from Roma last summer.

Meanwhile, the Arsenal side that lost 1-0 away to Olympiakos in Athens had an average age of 21 years and 215 days – making it the youngest in Champions League history. And this was despite the fact that the Gunners' line-up included 32-year-old Mikael Silvestre.

3 penalties Bayern goalkeeper Hans-Jorg Butt has scored against Juventus in the Champions League

RESULTS

WORLD

CLUB WORLD CUP

In Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Preliminary round

Dec 9
Al Ahli (UAE) 0
Auckland City (NZ) 2 (Dickinson 45, Coombes 67)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 11,856. **Ref:** O'Leary (NZ)
Auckland qualified for quarter-finals
Al Ahli: Abdalla - Surour, Mohammed (Ahmed 84), Abbas, Bare, Abd Rabo, Yaqoob, Ali (Madandhi 54), Jaber, Khamis, Hussain (Rashid 46).
Auckland: Spoerlein - Hogg, Williams, Lee, Coombes, Koprivcic (Jordan 71), Vicelich, Hayne (Fenerdis 85), McGeorge, Uhlmann (Campbell 90), Dinkinson.

Quarter-finals

Dec 11
TP Mazembe (DRC) 1 (Bedi 26)
Pohang Steelers (SKo) 2 (Denilson 50, 78)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 9,627. **Ref:** O'Leary (NZ)
TP Mazembe: Kidiaba - Mkulukuta, Mputu, Kabangu, Mabele, Bedi, Kalaytuka (Mvete 82), Mihaye, Ekanga (Kanda 83), Tshizau, Lusadisu (Kasongo 60).
Pohang: Shin Hwa-yong - Choi Hyo-jin, Kim Tae-su, Kim Jae-sung, Denilson, Hwang Jae-won, Kim Jung-kyum, Kim Hyun-gil, Nam Kung-do (Hwang Jin-sung 56), Shin Hyung-min (Ko Seul-ki 80), No Byung-jun (Song Chang-ho 88).

Dec 12
Auckland City 0
Atlante (Mex) 3 (Arreola 36, Bermudez 69, Silva 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 7,222. **Ref:** Odda (Ben)
Auckland: Spoerlein - Hogg, Williams, Lee (Nicolic 78), Coombes, Koprivcic (Young 66), Vicelich, Hayne, McGeorge, Uhlmann, Dickinson (Urlovic 66).
Atlante: Vilar - Martinez, Gonzalez, Navarro, Marquez (Pereyra 86), Solari (Silva 74), Guerrero, Bermudez, Rojas, Velasquez, Arreola.

Byes to semi-finals:
Barcelona (Spa), Estudiantes (Arg)

Semi-finals

Dec 15
Pohang Steelers 1 (Denilson 71)
Estudiantes 2 (Benitez 49, 53)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 22,626. **Ref:** Rosetti (Ita)
Pohang: Shin Hwa-yong - Choi Hyo-jin, Kim Tae-su (Okayama 58), Kim Jae-sung, Denilson, Hwang Jae-won, Kim Jung-kyum, Kim Hyun-gil, Nam Kung-do (Kim Meung-chung 46), Shin Hyung-min, No Byung-jun (Park Hee-chul 54).
Sent off: Hwang Jae-won 56min; Kim Jae-sung 72min. Shin Hwa-yong 77min.
Estudiantes: Albil - Rodriguez, Desabato (Cellay 68), Nunez, Re, Veron, Brana, Benitez (Salgueiro 83), Perez, Boselli, Diaz.

Dec 16
Atlante 1 (Rojas 5)
Barcelona 3 (Busquets 35, Messi 55, Pedro 67)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 40,955. **Ref:** Simon (Bra)
Atlante: Vilar - Martinez, Gonzalez, Navarro, Marquez, Solari (Carrevic 56), Guerrero, Bermudez, Rojas, Velasquez (Pereyra 63), Arreola.
Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Puyol, Marquez (Pique 54), Abidal, Busquets, Toure (Messi 53), Xavi, Ibrahimovic, Iniesta (Bojan 76), Pedro.

Fifth-place play-off

Dec 16
TP Mazembe 2 (Kasongo 60, Kasusula 67)
Auckland City 3 (Hayne 29, 72, Van Steeden 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 4,200. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
TP Mazembe: Kidiaba - Kasusula, Mputu, Kabangu (Kalaytuka 74), Mabele, Bedi, Mvete (Bakula 26), Mihaye, Mitandu, Ekanga, Kasongo.
Sent off: Kidiaba 24min.
Auckland: Gotthard - Hogg (Van Steeden 75), Campbell, Williams, Lee, Pritchett, Coombes, Koprivcic (Young 46), Vicelich, Hayne, Dickinson (Morgan 46).

Third-place play-off

Dec 19
Pohang Steelers 1 (Denilson 42)
Atlante 1 (Marquez 46)
No extra-time. **HT:** 1-0. **Att:** 13,814.
Ref: Breeze (Aus)
Pohang 4-3 on pens
Pohang: Song Dong-jin - Choi Hyo-jin, Okayama, Kim Tae-su, Denilson, Kim Meung-chung (Ko Seul-ki 65), Song Chang-ho (Ryu Chang-hyun 60), Kim Jung-kyum (Park Hee-chul 54), Kim Hyun-gil, Shin Hyung-min, No Byung-jun.
Atlante: Vilar - Martinez, Gonzalez, Navarro (Peralta 90), Marquez, Pereyra (Solari 90), Guerrero, Bermudez, Rojas, Velasquez, Arreola (Silva 46).

Final

Dec 19
Estudiantes 1 (Boselli 37)
Barcelona 2 (Pedro 89, Messi 110)
Aet. **HT:** 1-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 43,050.
Ref: Archundia (Mex)
Estudiantes: Albil - Rodriguez, Desabato, Cellay, Re (Rinje 90), Veron, Brana, Benitez (Sanchez 76), Perez (Nunez 79), Boselli, Diaz.
Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Puyol, Pique, Abidal, Xavi, Busquets (Toure 79), Keita (Pedro 46), Messi, Ibrahimovic, Henry (Jeffren 83).

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Dec 8
Juventus (Ita) 1 (Trezeguet 19)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 4 (Butt pen 30, Olic 52, Gomez 83, Tymoshchuk 90)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 27,811. **Ref:** Busacca (Swi)
Juventus: Buffon - Caceres, Legrottaglie, Cannavaro, Grosso, Camoranesi, Felipe Melo (Giovinco 81), Marchisio, Diego (Amauri 85), Del Piero (Poulsen 46), Trezeguet.
Bayern: Butt - Lahm, Van Buyten, Demichelis, Badstuber, Van Bommel, Schweinsteiger, Mullas, Franjic (Robben 72), Gomez, Olic (Tymoshchuk 79).

Dec 8
Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 0
Bordeaux (Fra) 1 (Jussie 13)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 25,800. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Maccabi: Davidovich - Mechumar, Keinan, Jorge Teixeira, Masilela (Tawatha 62), Cafuna, Kayali, Ratzetov, Golasa (Harazi 71), Dwalishvili (Arbeitman 54), Gbadir.
Bordeaux: Rame - Jullietti, Sane, Placente, Wendel, Fernando, Saivet, Traore (Sertic 76), Cavenaghi, Jussie, Belhion.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE - GROUP A - FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bordeaux	6	5	1	0	9	2	16
Bayern	6	3	1	2	9	5	10
Juventus	6	2	2	2	4	7	8
Maccabi Haifa	6	0	0	6	0	8	0

Group B

Dec 8
Besiktas (Tur) 1 (Bobo 86)
CSKA Moscow (Rus) 2 (Krasic 41, Aldonin 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 16,129. **Ref:** Hansson (Swe)
Besiktas: Rustu - Ibrahim Kas, Sivok, Ferrari, Ibrahim Uzulmez, Ekrem (Nihat 68), Ernst, Ibrahim Toraman, Fink (Inceman 77), Tello (Nobre 87), Bobo.
CSKA: Akinfeev - Odiah, Semberas, V Berezutsky, Schennikov, Krasic (Oliseh 82), Aldonin, Rahimic, Mamaev, Necid, Dzagoev (Grigoryev 90+).

Dec 8
Wolfsburg (Ger) 1 (Dzeko 56)
Manchester United (Eng) 3 (Owen 44, 83, 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 26,490. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)
Wolfsburg: Benaglio - Riether, Ricardo Costa, Barzagli, Schafer, Josue, Hasebe (Ziani 72), Gentner, Misimovic, Grafite (Dejagah 72), Dzeko.
Man Utd: Kuszczak - Fletcher, Carrick, Evra, Scholes, Anderson, Park, Gibson, Nani (Valencia 74), Owen, Welbeck (Obertan 74).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE - GROUP B - FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	6	4	1	1	10	6	13
CSKA Moscow	6	3	1	2	10	10	10
Wolfsburg	6	2	1	3	9	8	7
Besiktas	6	1	1	4	3	8	4

Group C

Dec 8
Marseille (Fra) 1 (Gonzalez 11)
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Cristiano Ronaldo 5, 80, Albiol 60)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 55,722. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
Marseille: Mandanda - Bennart, Diawara, Heinze, Taiwo, Cisse (Kone 62), Abriel, Gonzalez, Cheyrou, Brandan (Morientes 78), Niang (Valbuena 88).
Real Madrid: Casillas - Sergio Ramos, Pepe, Albiol, Arbeloa, L Diarra, Xabi Alonso (M Diarra 75), Cristiano Ronaldo, Van der Vaart (Raul 72), Marcelo, Higuain (Benzema 63).

Dec 8
Zurich (Swi) 1 (Gajic 29)
Milan (Ita) 1 (Ronaldinho pen 64)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 24,100. **Ref:** Proença (Por)
Zurich: Leoni - Koch, Bernetta, Tinnien, Rochat, Gajic (Margairaz 82), Aegerter, Okonkwo, Nikci (Venianthan 74), Djuric (Lamal 66), Alphonse.
Sent off: Rochat 63min.
Milan: Dida - Abate, Nesta, Thiago Silva (Kaladze 20), Antonini, Ambrosini (Flamini 55), Pirlo, Seedorf, Alexandre Pato, Borriello (Inzaghi 84), Ronaldinho.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE - GROUP C - FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	6	4	1	1	15	7	13
Milan	6	2	3	1	8	7	9
Marseille	6	2	1	3	10	10	7
Zurich	6	1	1	4	5	14	4

Group D

Dec 8
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 0
Porto (Por) 3 (Bruno Alves 2, Falcao Garcia 14, Hulk 76)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 24,803. **Ref:** Lannoy (Fra)
Atletico: Asenjo - Valera (Antonio Lopez 46), Juanito, Perea, Dominguez, Paulo Assuncao, Cleber Santana, Rodriguez (Reyes 68), Simao, Forlan, Aguero (Arnado 47).
Porto: Helton - Fucile, Maicon (Sapunaru 59), Bruno Alves, Pereira, Fernando, Raul Meireles, Valeri (Guarin 62), Rodriguez, Hulk, Falcao Garcia (Silvestre Varela 70).

Dec 8
Chelsea (Eng) 2 (Essien 18, Drogba 25)
APOEL Nicosia (Cyp) 2 (Zewlakow 6, Mirnavijevic 88)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 40,017. **Ref:** Trefoloni (Ita)
Chelsea: Turnbull - Bellett, Ricardo Carvalho, Terry, Zhirkov, Mikel, Essien (Lampard 26), J Cole, Kakuta (Borini 73), Malouda, Drogba.
APOEL: Chiotis - Poursaitidis, Broerse, Paulo Jorge, Hoxhi (Elia 34), Nuno Morais, Michael, Charalambidis, Nelio Pinto, Krasowski (Mirnavijevic 70), Zewlakow (Bresko 82).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE - GROUP D - FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chelsea	6	4	2	0	11	4	14
Porto	6	4	0	2	8	3	12
Al Madrid	6	0	3	3	3	12	3
APOEL	6	0	3	3	4	7	3

Long wait...Trezeguet

15 record number of away games Man United have gone unbeaten in the Champions League

HUNGARY
Losing record
Debrecen's 4-0 loss at Lyon meant they conceded 19 goals in six games – the joint-worst record in Champions League history, along with Dynamo Kyiv (2007-08) and Ferencvaros (1995-96).

ITALY
Consolation goal
David Trezeguet's goal in Juventus' 4-1 Champions League defeat by Bayern Munich ended a 42-month wait since his last goal in the tournament. Trezeguet's goal – his 168th for Juve – also made him the fourth-highest scorer in the club's history.

UKRAINE
Shevchenko's ton
Andriy Shevchenko made his 100th Champions League appearance as Dynamo Kyiv lost 2-1 at home to Barcelona.

Century...Shevchenko

Group E

Dec 9
Liverpool (Eng) 1 (Benayoun 43)
Fiorentina (Ita) 2 (Jorgensen 63, Gilardino 90)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 40,863. **Ref:** Skomina (Slo)
Liverpool: Cavalieri - Darby, Skrtel, Agger, Insua, Mascherano (Fabio Aurelio 84), Aquilani (Pacheco 76), Benayoun, Gerrard, Dossena, Kuijt (Fernando Torres 65).
Fiorentina: Frey - Comotto, Natali, Kroldrup, Pasqual, De Silvestri (Castillo 82), Montolivo, Donadel, Jorgensen (Vargas 72), Santana (Marchionni 71), Gilardino.

Dec 9
Lyon (Fra) 4 (Gomis 25, Michel Bastos 44, Pjanic 59, Cissokho 76)
Debrecen (Hun) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 36,884. **Ref:** Meyer (Ger)
Lyon: Coris - Reveillere, Cris, Boumsong, Cissokho, Gonalons, Makoun (Kallstrom 73), Delgado, Gevou (Pjanic 29), Gomis (Lopez 67), Michel Bastos.
Debrecen: Pantic - Bodnar (Bernath 52), Meszaros, Mijadinoski, Laczko, Czvitkovics, Szelesi, Ramos (Kiss 57), Szakaly (Feczesin 75), Varga, Coulibaly.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fiorentina	6	5	0	1	14	7	15
Lyon	6	4	1	1	12	3	13
Liverpool	6	2	1	3	5	7	7
Debrecen	6	0	0	6	5	19	0

Group F

Dec 9
Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr) 1 (Milevskyi 2)
Barcelona (Spa) 2 (Xavi 33, Messi 86)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 16,300. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Dynamo: Shovkovskyi - Eremenko, Yussuf, Betan, Gerson Magrao (Nenkovic 75), Shevchenko, Leandro Almeida, Mikhailik, Yarmolenko, Vukojevic, Milevskyi.
Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Pique (Marquez 88), Puyol, Abidal, Xavi, Busquets, Keita, Messi, Ibrahimovic, Iniesta (Pedro 82).

Dec 9
Internazionale (Ita) 2 (Eto'o 31, Balotelli 64)
Rubin Kazan (Rus) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 49,539. **Ref:** Vink (Hol)
Inter: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Lucio, Samuel (Cordoba 15), Zanetti, Stankovic (Cambiasso 51), Thiago Motta, Eto'o, Sneijder, Balotelli (Muntari 77), Milito.
Rubin: Ryzhikov - Kaleshin, Sakakvadze, Cesar Navas, Popov, Ryazantsev (Bakayokin 84), Noboa (Bystrov 61), Semak, Mirawski, Gekdeniz (Kasaev 74), Dominguez.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	6	3	2	1	7	3	11
Internazionale	6	2	3	1	7	6	9
Rubin Kazan	6	1	3	2	4	7	6
Dynamo Kyiv	6	1	2	3	7	9	5

Group G

Dec 9
Sevilla (Spa) 1 (Kanoute pen 8)
Rangers (Sco) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 31,560. **Ref:** Layec (Fra)
Sevilla: Palop - Konko, Cala, Dragutinovic, Fernando Navarro, Jesus Navas (Kone 81), Zokora, Romario (Duscher 74), Capel, Renato, Kanoute (Negredo 60).
Rangers: McGregor - Whittaker, Weir, Bougherra, Papac, Thomson, McCulloch, Beasley (Lafferty 46), Davis, Smith (Fleck 85), Miller (Novo 46).

Dec 9
Stuttgart (Ger) 3 (Marica 5, Trasch 6, Pogrebnyak 11)
Unirea Urziceni (Rom) 1 (Semedo 46)
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 37,000. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Stuttgart: Lehmann - Celozzi, Tasci, Delpierre, Boka, Trasch, Khedira (Kuzmanovic 60), Gebhart, Hleb (Rudy 85), Marica (Cacau 83), Pogrebnyak.
Urziceni: Ariauskis - Bordeanu, Bruno Fernandes, Mehmedovic, Brandan, Paduretu, Apostol (Todoran 85), Semedo, Omofias (Varga 46), Balan (Ruseescu 62), Bilasco.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sevilla	6	4	1	1	11	4	13
Stuttgart	6	2	3	1	9	7	9
Urziceni	6	2	2	2	8	8	8
Rangers	6	0	2	4	4	13	2

Group H

Dec 9
Olympiakos (Gre) 1 (Leonardo 47)
Arsenal (Eng) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 30,277. **Ref:** Cortez Batista (Por)
Olympiakos: Nikopolidis - Galitsios, A Papadopoulos, Mellberg, Raul Bravo, Dudu Cearense (Domi 86), Maresca, Galletti, Oscar (Pantos 90), Leonardo, Mitroglou.
Arsenal: Fabianski - Gilbert, Bartley, Silvestre, Cruise, Ramsey, Song, Merida, Walcott, Wilshere (Sunu 76), Vela.

Dec 9
Standard Liege (Bel) 1 (Bolat 90+)
AZ Alkmaar (Hol) 1 (Lens 42)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 24,359. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)
Standard: Bolat - Camozzato, Sarr, Felipe (Cyriac 85), Mulemo, Dalmat (Traore 80), Nicaise, Witsel, De Camargo, Jovanovic, Mockani.
AZ: Romero - Jaliens, Moisander, Moreno, Poonguni, Mendes da Silva, Schaars, Dembele, El Hamdaoui (Pelle 90), Holman (Martens 46), Lens (Wernbloem 72).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	6	4	1	1	12	5	13
Olympiakos	6	3	1	2	4	5	10
Standard	6	1	2	3	7	9	5
AZ Alkmaar	6	0	4	2	4	8	4

Top two in each group qualified for 1st knockout round; 3rd-placed teams enter Europa League at 1st knockout round stage

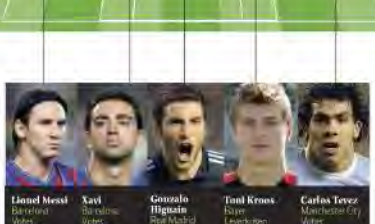
1st knockout round draw

Bayern Munich v Fiorentina**
CSKA Moscow v Sevilla****
Internazionale v Chelsea****
Lyon v Real Madrid*
Milan v Manchester United*
Olympiakos v Bordeaux***
Porto v Arsenal**
Stuttgart v Barcelona***
*1st leg - February 16; 2nd leg - March 10
**1st leg - February 17; 2nd leg - March 9
***1st leg - February 23; 2nd leg - March 17
****1st leg - February 24; 2nd leg - March 16

ESM Team of the Month

European Sports Magazines DECEMBER 2009

Cesc Fabregas, Arsenal, Votes: ●●●●●
Dani Alves, Barcelona, Votes: ●●●
Richard Dunne, Aston Villa, Votes: ●●●
Hans-Jorg Butt, Bayern Munich, Votes: ●●
Daniel Van Buyten, Bayern Munich, Votes: ●●●●●●
Maicon, Internazionale, Votes: ●●●


Lionel Messi, Barcelona, Votes: ●●●●●●●●
Xavi, Barcelona, Votes: ●●●●
Gonzalo Higuain, Real Madrid, Votes: ●●●●●●
Toni Kroos, Bayer Leverkusen, Votes: ●●●
Carlos Tevez, Manchester City, Votes: ●●●

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Magazines group vote for their first XI from Europe's top leagues. The players with the most votes make the overall team. For details of how ESM members voted this month, visit: **worldsoccer.com/esm11**

TURKEY

Gala go through but lose proud away record

Having beaten Panathinaikos of Greece 1-0 to ensure they finished top of their Europa League group, Galatasaray's surprise 1-0 defeat away to bottom-of-the-group Sturm Graz of Austria in their next game was the Turkish side's first away defeat in Europe for 11 games.

Beaten...Gala's Ayhan Akman (left)

BELGIUM

Mouscron kicked out and results expunged

Mouscron have been expelled from the Belgian First Division after they failed to field a side in games against Cercle Brugge and Kortrijk following financial difficulties.

Their withdrawal from the league means that all of their results so far this season are now void, thus reducing Anderlecht's five-point lead over Club Brugge at the top of the table going into the winter break to three points.

However, the biggest sufferers were Lokeren, who lost six points and are now joint bottom of the table with Roeselare.

There will be no automatic relegation at the end of the season. The side finishing in 15th place will take part in a relegation play-off.

CYPRUS

Campo's new challenge

Former Real Madrid star Ivan Campo has joined second division side AEK Larnaca.

The 35-year-old midfielder – who more recently had spells in English football with Bolton Wanderers and Ipswich Town – has signed a six-month contract with AEK, who are in second place behind city rivals Alki.

EUROPA LEAGUE

Group A
Dec 2: Anderlecht (Bel) 0 Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 1; Timisoara (Rom) 1 Ajax (Hol) 2.
Dec 17: Ajax 1 Anderlecht 3; Dinamo Zagreb 1 Timisoara 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	6	3	2	1	9	4	11
Ajax	6	3	2	1	8	6	11
Dinamo Z	6	2	0	4	6	8	6
Timisoara	6	1	2	3	4	9	5

Group B
Dec 2: Slavia Prague (Cze) 0 Genoa (Ita) 0; Valencia (Spa) 3 Lille (Fra) 1.
Dec 17: Genoa 1 Valencia 2; Lille 3 Slavia Prague 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Valencia	6	3	3	0	12	8	12
Lille	6	3	1	2	15	9	10
Genoa	6	2	1	3	8	10	7
Slavia Prague	6	0	3	3	5	13	3

Group C
Dec 2: Celtic (Sco) 2 Hapoel Tel Aviv (Isr) 0; Hamburg (Ger) 2 Rapid Wien (Aut) 0.
Dec 17: Hapoel Tel Aviv 1 Hamburg 0; Rapid Wien 3 Celtic 3.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hapoel Tel Aviv	6	4	0	2	13	8	12
Hamburg	6	3	1	2	7	6	10
Celtic	6	1	3	2	7	7	6
Rapid Wien	6	1	2	3	8	14	5

Group D
Dec 2: Sporting Lisbon (Por) 1 Heerenveen (Hol) 1; Ventspils (Lat) 0 Hertha Berlin (Ger) 1.
Dec 16: Heerenveen 5 Ventspils 0; Hertha Berlin 1 Sporting Lisbon 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sporting L	6	3	2	1	8	6	11
Hertha Berlin	6	3	1	2	6	5	10
Heerenveen	6	2	2	2	11	7	8
Ventspils	6	0	3	3	3	10	3

Group E
Dec 2: Fulham (Eng) 1 CSKA Sofia (Bul) 0; Roma (Ita) 2 Basle (Swi) 1.
Dec 16: Basle 2 Fulham 3; CSKA Sofia 0 Roma 3.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Roma	6	4	1	1	10	5	13
Fulham	6	3	2	1	8	6	11
Basle	6	3	0	3	10	7	9
CSKA Sofia	6	0	1	5	2	12	1

Group F
Dec 2: Dinamo Bucharest (Rom) 2 Sturm Graz (Aut) 1; Galatasaray (Tur) 1 Panathinaikos (Gre) 0.
Dec 16: Panathinaikos 3 Dinamo Bucharest 0; Sturm Graz 1 Galatasaray 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galatasaray	6	4	1	1	12	4	13
Panathinaikos	6	4	0	2	7	4	12
Dinamo Buch	6	2	0	4	4	12	6
Sturm Graz	6	1	1	4	3	6	4

Group G
Dec 2: Levski Sofia (Bul) 0 Villarreal (Spa) 2; Salzburg (Aut) 2 Lazio (Ita) 1.
Dec 17: Lazio 0 Levski Sofia 1; Villarreal 0 Salzburg 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	6	6	0	0	9	2	18
Villarreal	6	3	0	3	8	6	9
Lazio	6	2	0	4	8	10	6
Levski Sofia	6	1	0	5	1	9	3

Group H
Dec 2: Sheriff (Mol) 1 Steaua Bucharest (Rom) 1; Twente Enschede (Hol) 0 Fenerbahce (Tur) 1.
Dec 17: Fenerbahce 1 Sheriff 0; Steaua Bucharest 1 Twente Enschede 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	6	5	0	1	8	3	15
Twente	6	2	2	2	5	6	8
Sheriff	6	1	2	3	4	5	5
Steaua	6	0	4	2	3	6	4

Group I
Dec 2: AEK Athens (Gre) 0 Everton (Eng) 1; BATE Borisov (Bls) 1 Benfica (Por) 2.
Dec 17: Benfica 2 AEK Athens 1; Everton 0 BATE Borisov 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP I – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica	6	5	0	1	13	3	15
Everton	6	3	0	3	7	9	9
BATE Borisov	6	2	1	3	7	9	7
AEK Athens	6	1	1	4	5	11	4

Group J
Dec 2: Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 0 Club Brugge (Blg) 0; Toulouse (Fra) 1 Partizan Belgrade (Ser) 0.
Dec 16: Club Brugge 1 Toulouse 0; Partizan Belgrade 1 Shakhtar Donetsk 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP J – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar	6	4	1	1	14	3	13
Club Brugge	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
Toulouse	6	2	1	3	6	11	7
Partizan	6	1	0	5	6	14	3

Group K
Dec 2: Copenhagen (Den) 2 CFR Cluj (Rom) 0; PSV Eindhoven (Hol) 1 Sparta Prague (Cze) 0.
Dec 16: CFR Cluj 0 PSV Eindhoven 2; Sparta Prague 0 Copenhagen 3.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP K – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	6	4	2	0	8	3	14
Copenhagen	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Sparta Prague	6	2	1	3	7	9	7
CFR Cluj	6	1	0	5	4	10	3

Group L
Dec 2: Austria Wien (Aut) 0 Athletic Bilbao (Spa) 3; Werder Bremen (Ger) 4 Nacional (Por) 1.
Dec 16: Athletic Bilbao 0 Werder Bremen 3; Nacional 5 Austria Wien 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP L – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Werder	6	5	1	0	17	6	16
Ath Bilbao	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
Nacional	6	1	2	3	11	12	5
Austria Wien	6	0	2	4	4	16	2

Top two in each group qualified for 1st knockout round, to which the third-placed teams from the eight Champions League groups also qualified

1st knockout round draw

Ajax v Juventus ^
Athletic Bilbao v Anderlecht
Atletico Madrid^ v Galatasaray**
Club Brugge v Valencia
Copenhagen v Marseille^
Everton v Sporting Lisbon*
Fulham v Shakhtar Donetsk
Hamburg v PSV Eindhoven
Hertha Berlin v Benfica**
Lille v Fenerbahce
Liverpool ^ v Unirea Urziceni ^
Panathinaikos v Roma
Rubin Kazan ^ v Hapoel Tel Aviv
Standard Liege^ v Salzburg
Twente Enschede v Werder Bremen
Villarreal v Wolfsburg^

1st legs - February 18; 2nd legs - February 25
**1st leg - February 16*
***2nd leg - February 23*
^entered from Champions League

AUSTRIA

Dec 4: Mattersburg 1 Wiener Neustadt 3.
Dec 5: Rapid 3 Kapfenberger 1.
Dec 6: Sturm 0 Salzburg 0; Ried 0 Austria Wien 2; Austria Karnten 1 LASK 1.
Dec 11: Salzburg 1 Austria Karnten 0.
Dec 12: Wiener Neustadt 4 LASK 0; Kapfenberger 2 Mattersburg 2; Rapid 2 Ried 1.
Dec 13: Sturm 2 Austria Wien 2.

AUSTRIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rapid	19	12	5	2	44	18	41
Salzburg	19	11	6	2	37	17	39
Austria Wien	19	11	3	5	33	23	36
Sturm	19	8	8	5	28	19	30
Ried	19	7	6	6	24	19	27
W Neustadt	19	7	3	9	33	36	24
Mattersburg	19	7	2	10	26	34	23
LASK	19	4	6	9	40	52	18
Kapfenberger	19	5	3	11	22	37	18
A Karnten	19	1	4	14	14	46	7

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 13/14

BELGIUM

Dec 4: Mechelen 2 Gent 5.
Dec 5: Charleroi 0 St Truiden 0; Genk 0 Westerlo 0; Kortrijk 1 Zulte Waregem 0; Standard 2 Germinal Beerschot 2.
Dec 6: Lokeren 0 Club Brugge 1; Cercle Brugge 1 Anderlecht 3.
Dec 11: Westerlo 0 Anderlecht 2.
Dec 12: Germinal Beerschot 0 Charleroi 0; St Truiden 0 Kortrijk 2; Club Brugge 1 Mechelen 1; Standard 0 Roeselare 1.
Dec 13: Zulte Waregem 1 Cercle Brugge 0; Gent 2 Genk 1.
Dec 19: Kortrijk 1 Westerlo 1; Roeselare 1 St Truiden 2; Lokeren 0 Gent 1; Genk 2 Zulte Waregem 2.
Dec 26: Standard 2 Lokeren 0; Germinal Beerschot 1 Genk 0; Club Brugge 2 Cercle Brugge 1; St Truiden 5 Mechelen 2; Charleroi 3 Roeselare 0.
Dec 27: Gent 2 Anderlecht 2; Zulte Waregem 1 Westerlo 0.
Dec 28: Genk 0 St Truiden 0; Cercle Brugge 2 Standard 0.
Dec 30: Kortrijk 1 Club Brugge 4; Mechelen 1 Charleroi 0; Anderlecht 2 Zulte Waregem 1; Roeselare 0 Gent 4; Lokeren 2 Germinal Beerschot 0.

BELGIUM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	19	14	3	2	37	15	45
Club Brugge	19	13	3	3	38	22	42
Gent	20	12	3	5	41	22	39
Germinal B	19	9	5	5	25	21	32
Z Waregem	20	8	6	6	30	26	30
St Truiden	20	8	5	7	26	28	29
Standard	19	7	7	5	29	21	28
Kortrijk	19	7	6	6	21	20	27
Mechelen	19	8	1	10	26	36	25
Westerlo	19	5	5	9	19	25	20
Genk	19	4	6	7	21	22	20
Charleroi	19	4	7	8	19	27	19
Cercle Brugge	19	4	5	10	26	32	17
Lokeren	19	3	3	13	14	29	12
Roeselare	19	3	3	13	21	46	12

Mouscron withdrew from league because of financial problems, all results expunged

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Siroki Brijeg	15	10	2	3	27	12	32
Borac	15	10	1	4	20	9	31
Sarajevo	15	8	4	3	21	14	28
Velez	15	8	3	4	27	13	27
Zeljeznicar	15	7	4	4	19	13	25
Zrinjski	15	7	4	4	23	19	25
Leotar	15	7	1	7	14	19	22
Modrica	15	6	3	6	24	25	21
Rudar	15	6	2	7	14	14	20
Olimpik	15	5	4	6	15	23	19
Travnik	15	5	3	7	21	22	18
Zvijezda	15	5	2	8	15	25	17
Slavija	15	4	4	7	14	17	16
Celik	15	4	3	8	14	17	15
Sloboda	15	4	2	9	10	23	14
Laktasi	15	2	2	11	15	28	8

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 27/28

BULGARIA

Dec 4: Slavia 3 Beroe 1.
Dec 5: Botev 2 Pirin 2; Lokomotiv Sofia 3 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 0; Minyor 1 Lokomotiv Mezdra 0.
Dec 6: Sliven 1 Levski 0; CSKA 0 Chernomorets 0.
Dec 7: Montana 1 Cherno More 2; Lovech 2 Sportist 0.

BULGARIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lovech	15	11	2	2	26	9	35
CSKA	15	9	4	2	24	8	31
Lok Sofia	15	8	4	3	25	17	28
Chernomorets	15	8	3	4	23	14	27
Levski	15	8	2	5	29	16	26
Minyor	15	8	2	5	22	12	26
Slavia	15	7	3	5	16	15	24
Beroe	15	6	5	4	16	17	23
Cherno More	15	6	4	5	19	14	22
Pirin	15	6	4	5	14	13	22
Montana	15	4	5	6	14	19	17
Sliven	15	4	2	9	13	22	14
Lok Mezdra	15	4	1	10	16	29	13
Sportist	15	3	2	10	11	26	11
Lok Plovdiv	15	2	3	10	13	33	9
Botev	15	1	4	10	12	33	7

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of March 6/7

Heading for France...Koller

CZECH REPUBLIC

Koller carries on

Jan Koller, the Czech Republic's all-time leading international scorer with 55 goals in 91 games, has joined French third division side Cannes from Russian top-flight club Samara.

"At 36 years, I no longer have big ambitions. I want to play football for fun," said Koller, whose previous clubs include Anderlecht, Borussia Dortmund and Monaco.

His agent claimed he had rejected offers from Germany and China to play in France.

ENGLAND

Megson dismissed by Bolton

Bolton Wanderers sacked manager Gary Megson after they surrendered a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 with fellow relegation strugglers Hull City.

Megson, who was taking charge of his 99th game with the club, provoked the anger of the home supporters when he subbed Bolton's opening goalscorer Ivan Klasnic as he tried to protect his side's lead.

There were no English players on the pitch at the start of Arsenal's 4-1 win at Portsmouth – it was the first time that this has happened in the Premier League.

Costly substitution...Megson

CROATIA

Dec 4: Inter 1 Zagreb 3.
Dec 5: Lokomotiva 2 Istra 1; Rijeka 3 Varteks 3; Slaven 1 Cibalia 1; Zadar 1 Hajduk 2; Sesvete 0 Karlovac 3; Osijek 3 Sibenik 0.
Dec 6: Medimurje 1 Dinamo 4.

CROATIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	17	12	3	2	51	10	39
Cibalia	17	9	6	2	26	9	33
Sibenik	17	10	3	4	16	17	33
Osijek	17	9	4	4	35	25	31
Karlovac	17	8	5	4	19	12	29
Slaven	17	8	5	4	30	28	29
Hajduk	17	8	4	5	23	13	28
Lokomotiva	17	8	1	8	21	23	25
Rijeka	17	6	5	6	28	26	23
Inter	17	6	2	9	24	27	20
Varteks	17	5	5	7	19	25	20
Zadar	17	5	3	9	14	27	18
Medimurje	17	5	2	10	21	38	17
Zagreb	17	4	2	11	24	35	14
Istra	17	3	4	10	15	31	13
Sesvete	17	1	4	12	17	42	7

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 20/21

CYPRUS

Dec 4: APOEL 1 Apollon 1.
Dec 5: AEL 1 Omonia 0; APOP 2 Anorthosis 0.
Dec 6: Ermis 1 Ethnikos 0; ENP 2 APEP 0.
Dec 7: Aris 1 Doxa 4.
Dec 12: AEP 1 AEL 0; Apollon 1 APOP 0; Anorthosis 2 ENP 0.
Dec 13: APEP 3 Ermis 3; Omonia 1 APOEL 1; Doxa 0 Nea Salamina 0.
Dec 14: Ethnikos 0 Aris 0.
Dec 19: APEP 2 Aris 1; Ethnikos 2 Nea Salamina 1; Doxa 1 AEL 0; AEP 1 Omonia 3.
Dec 20: Apollon 1 ENP 1; APOEL 3 APOP 1.
Dec 21: Anorthosis 1 Ermis 0.
Dec 23: Nea Salamina 0 AEP 0.
Jan 2: ENP 3 APOP 1; AEL 2 Ethnikos 2.
Jan 3: Ermis 1 Apollon 2; Nea Salamina 1 APEP 2; AEP 0 APOEL 1; Aris 0 Anorthosis 3.
Jan 4: Omonia 3 Doxa 0.

CYPRUS	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
APOEL	15	10	4	1	29	11	34
Omonia	15	10	4	1	27	10	34
Anorthosis	15	10	3	2	24	11	33
Apollon	15	9	5	1	23	9	32
APOP	15	8	2	5	24	20	26
AEL	15	7	2	6	17	12	23
ENP	15	4	5	6	15	21	17
Ermis	15	4	4	7	19	20	16
AEP	15	4	4	7	13	19	16
Doxa	15	4	4	7	15	22	16
Aris	15	3	4	8	17	26	13
APEP	15	3	3	9	14	26	12
Ethnikos	15	3	3	9	10	22	12
Nea Salamina	15	0	5	10	11	29	5

CZECH REPUBLIC

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Teplice	15	9	5	1	29	16	32
Sparta	16	8	8	0	18	7	32
Ostrava	16	9	4	3	23	15	31
Jablonec	16	9	4	3	17	12	31
Plzen	15	7	5	3	17	13	26
M Boleslav	16	7	4	5	26	21	25
Slavia	16	6	6	4	21	14	24
Pribram	16	7	2	7	17	17	23
Ostrava	16	6	4	6	27	17	22
Liberec	16	6	2	8	18	22	20
Bohemians 1905	16	4	5	7	9	13	17
Banik	16	4	5	7	13	22	17
C Budejovice	16	3	5	8	13	21	14
Slovacko	16	4	2	10	14	23	14
Kladno	16	3	2	11	12	27	11
Bohemians	16	3	1	12	15	32	10

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 20/21

DENMARK

Dec 5: SonderjyskE 2 AaB 0.
Dec 8: Nordsjaelland 3 Midtjylland 0; Randers 2 HB Koge 1; Silkeborg 3 Brondby 0; OB 0 Copenhagen 2.
Dec 7: AGF 1 Esbjerg 1.

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
OB	18	11	5	2	29	17	38
Copenhagen	18	11	4	3	31	11	37
Esbjerg	18	9	6	3	31	21	33
Silkeborg	18	8	5	5	30	20	29
Brondby	18	8	3	7	35	32	27
AGF	18	7	6	5	24	23	27
AaB	18	7	4	7	20	15	25
Nordsjaelland	18	7	2	9	21	24	23
SonderjyskE	18	6	4	8	15	18	22
Midtjylland	18	6	3	9	22	31	21
Randers	18	1	5	12	13	33	8
HB Koge	18	1	5	12	15	41	8

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of March 6/7

ENGLAND

Saturday, December 5
Arsenal 2 (Arshavin 26, Ramsey 79)
Stoke 0 Att: 60,048

Aston Villa 3 (Dunne 13, Milner 29, Carew pen 88)
Hull 0 Att: 39,748

Blackburn 0
Liverpool 0 Att: 29,669

Manchester City 2 (Adebayor 37, Tevez 56)
Chelsea 1 (Adebayor og 8) Att: 47,348

Portsmouth 2 (Hreidarsson 65, Dindane 84)
Burnley 0 Att: 17,922

West Ham 0
Manchester United 4 (Scholes 45, Gibson 61, Valencia 70, Rooney 72) Att: 34,980

Wigan 2 (N'Zogbia 33, Gomez 89)
Birmingham 3 (Larsson 61, 72, Benitez 66) Att: 18,797

Wolverhampton 2 (Craddock 3, Milijas 63)
Bolton 1 (Elmander 79) Att: 27,362

Sunday, December 6
Everton 2 (Saha 78, Cahill 86)
Tottenham 2 (Defoe 47, Dawson 58) Att: 34,003

Fulham 1 (Zamora 7)
Sunderland 0 Att: 23,168

Saturday, December 12
Birmingham 1 (Bowyer 52)
West Ham 0 Att: 28,203

Bolton 3 (Klasnic 11, 53, Cahill 43)
Manchester City 3 (Tevez 26, 77, Richards 45) Att: 22,735

Burnley 1 (Elliott 60)
Fulham 1 (Zamora 50) Att: 18,397

Chelsea 3 (Drogba 18, 59, Anelka 23)
Everton 3 (Cech og 12, Aiyegbeni 45, Saha 63) Att: 41,579

Hull 0
Blackburn 0 Att: 24,124

Manchester United 0
Aston Villa 1 (Agbonlahor 21) Att: 75,138

Stoke 2 (Tuncay 37, Shawcross 74)
Wigan 2 (Boyce 15, Figueroa 72) Att: 26,728

Sunderland 1 (Bent 23)
Portsmouth 1 (Kaboul 90) Att: 37,578

Tottenham 0
Wolverhampton 1 (Doyle 3) Att: 36,012

Sunday, December 13
Liverpool 1 (Kuijt 41)
Arsenal 2 (Johnson og 50, Arshavin 58) Att: 43,853

Tuesday, December 15
Birmingham 2 (Jerome 12, 48)
Blackburn 1 (Nelsen 69) Att: 23,187

Bolton 3 (Lee 64, Klasnic 77, Cahill 88)
West Ham 1 (Diamanti 89) Att: 17,849

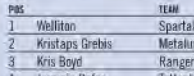
Manchester United 3 (Rooney pen 30, Vidic 43, Valencia 66)
Wolverhampton 0 Att: 73,708

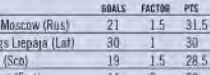
Sunderland 0
Aston Villa 2 (Heskey 24, Milner 61) Att: 34,821

Wednesday, December 16
Burnley 1 (Alexander pen 28)
Arsenal 1 (Fabregas 7) Att: 21,369

Chelsea 2 (Anelka 23, Lampard pen 79)
Portsmouth 1 (Piquionne 51) Att: 40,137

Liverpool 2 (Ngog 9, Fernando Torres 79)
Wigan 1 (N'Zogbia 90) Att: 41,116





STANDINGS ON JANUARY 4

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Wellinton	Spartak Moscow (Rus)	21	1.5	31.5
2	Kristaps Grebis	Metalurgs Liepaja (Lat)	30	1	30
3	Kris Boyd	Rangers (Sco)	19	1.5	28.5
4	Jermain Defoe	Tottenham (Eng)	14	2	28
	Didier Drogba	Chelsea (Eng)	14	2	28
	Wayne Rooney	Manchester United (Eng)	14	2	28
7	Vitali Gussev	Levadia Tallinn (Est)	27	1	27
	Luis Suarez	Ajax (Hol)	18	1.5	27
9	Darren Bent	Sunderland (Eng)	13	2	26
10	Seydou Doumbia	Young Boys (Swi)	17	1.5	25.5
	Rade Prica	Rosenborg (Nor)	17	1.5	25.5
12	Aleksandr Bukharov	Rubin Kazan (Rus)	16	1.5	24
	Mame Diouf	Molde (Nor)	16	1.5	24
	Alejandro Dominguez	Rubin Kazan (Rus)	16	1.5	24
	Fernando Torres	Liverpool (Eng)	12	2	24
	Stefan Kiessling	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)	12	2	24
	Peter Kovacs	Odd Grenland (Nor)	16	1.5	24
	Gary Twigg	Shamrock Rovers (Ire)	24	1	24
	David Villa	Valencia (Spa)	12	2	24

Stuttgart boss...Gross

GEORGIA

WIT win Supercup

WIT Georgia beat Georgian Cup holders Dinamo Tbilisi 2-1 in extra time to win the Georgian Supercup.

Georgi Datunaishvili opened the scoring for the league champions, before Dinamo levelled through Gulverd Tomashvili. Nikoloz Pirtskhalava then scored an own goal from Georgi Kakhelishvili's cross to hand WIT the trophy in the final minute of extra time.

GERMANY

Strugglers hope for a change of fortune

Former Tottenham Hotspur manager Christian Gross has taken over from ex-Liverpool defender Markus Babbel as boss of Stuttgart after they picked up just two wins from their opening 15 league games.

Elsewhere, struggling Nurnberg appointed Dieter Hecking – who resigned as coach of Hannover in August – to replace Michael Oenning.

HOLLAND

Unbeaten leaders

At the halfway stage of the Eredivisie, pace-setters Twente and PSV Eindhoven have an astonishing 92 points between them, with neither team having lost.

Twente were also on a 12-game winning streak in the league when the winter break arrived – and only Lautoka of Fiji had a better club record in world football in 2009.

Ajax striker Luis Suarez, who is the league's top scorer this season with 18 goals in 17 games, scored six as his side beat third-tier WHC Wezep 14-1 in the fourth round of the

Tottenham 3 (Kranjcar 37, 90, Defoe 54)
Manchester City 0 Att: 35,691

Saturday, December 19
Arsenal 3 (Denilson 45, Eduardo 59, Diaby 80)
Hull 0 Att: 60,006

Aston Villa 1 (Carew 51)
Stoke 0 Att: 35,852

Blackburn 0
Tottenham 2 (Crouch 45, 63) Att: 28,490

Fulham 3 (Murphy 22, Zamora 46, Duff 75)
Manchester United 0 Att: 25,700

Manchester City 4 (Santa Cruz 4, 69, Tevez pen 12, Bellamy 35)
Sunderland 3 (Mensah 16, Henderson 24, Jones 62) Att: 44,735

Portsmouth 2 (Belhadj 33, Piquionne 82)
Liverpool 0 Att: 20,524

Sunday, December 20
Everton 1 (Bilyaletdinov 6)
Birmingham 1 (Larsson 22) Att: 33,660

West Ham 1 (Diamanti pen 44)
Chelsea 1 (Lampard pen 61) Att: 33,388

Wolverhampton 2 (Milijas 16, Doyle 50)
Burnley 0 Att: 27,410

Saturday, December 26
Birmingham 0
Chelsea 0 Att: 28,958

Burnley 1 (Nugent 56)
Bolton 1 (Taylor 29) Att: 21,781

Fulham 0
Tottenham 0 Att: 25,679

Liverpool 2 (Gerrard 62, Benayoun 70)
Wolverhampton 0 Att: 41,956

Manchester City 2 (Petrov 27, Tevez 45)
Stoke 0 Att: 47,325

Sunderland 1 (Bent 17)
Everton 1 (Fellaini 85) Att: 46,990

West Ham 2 (Diamanti pen 23, Kovac 88)
Portsmouth 0 Att: 33,696

Wigan 1 (Rodallega 53)
Blackburn 1 (McCarthy 36) Att: 20,243

Sunday, December 27
Arsenal 3 (Fabregas 65, 81, Diaby 90)
Aston Villa 0 Att: 60,056

Hull 1 (Fagan pen 59)
Manchester United 3 (Rooney 45, Dawson og 73, Berbatov 82) Att: 24,627

Monday, December 28
Blackburn 2 (Gamel Pedersen 53, Diouf 77)
Sunderland 2 (Bent 52, 65) Att: 25,858

Chelsea 2 (Drogba 73, Smalling og 75)
Fulham 1 (Gera 3) Att: 41,895

Everton 2 (Naughton 82, Pienaar 90)
Burnley 0 Att: 39,419

Stoke 0
Birmingham 1 (Jerome 50) Att: 27,211

Tottenham 2 (Modric 11, Defoe 82)
West Ham 0 Att: 35,994

Wolverhampton 0
Manchester City 3 (Tevez 33, 87, Garrido 70) Att: 28,957

Tuesday, December 29
Aston Villa 0
Liverpool 1 (Fernando Torres 90) Att: 42,788

Bolton 2 (Klasnic 20, K Davies 61)
Hull 2 (Hunt 71, 78) Att: 20,696

Wednesday, December 30
Manchester United 5 (Rooney 28, Carrick 31, Rafael 44, Berbatov 50, Valencia 76)
Wigan 0 Att: 74,960

Portsmouth 1 (Belhadj 74)
Arsenal 4 (Eduardo 28, Nasri 42, Ramsey 69, Song 80) Att: 20,404

ENGLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chelsea	20	14	3	3	45	16	45
Man Utd	20	14	1	5	45	16	43
Arsenal	19	13	2	4	51	21	41
Tottenham	20	11	4	5	42	22	37
Man City	19	9	8	2	38	27	35
Aston Villa	20	10	5	5	29	16	35
Liverpool	20	10	3	7	37	25	33
Birmingham	20	9	5	6	20	18	32
Fulham	19	7	6	6	24	19	27
Sunderland	20	6	5	9	26	31	23
Everton	19	5	7	7	26	32	22
Stoke	18	5	6	8	15	23	21
Blackburn	20	5	6	9	20	25	21
Burnley	20	5	5	10	22	40	20
Wolves	20	5	4	11	17	36	19
Wigan	19	3	4	10	21	44	13
West Ham	20	4	6	10	26	37	18
Bolton	18	4	6	8	26	36	18
Hull	20	4	6	10	20	42	18
Portsmouth	20	4	2	14	18	32	14

LEADING GOALSCORERS
14 Jermain Defoe (Tottenham)
14 Didier Drogba (Chelsea)
14 Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)
13 Darren Bent (Sunderland)
12 Fernando Torres (Liverpool)

FA CUP – last 64

Jan 2: Aston Villa 3 Blackburn 1; Blackpool 1 Ipswich 2; Bolton 4 Lincoln 0; Everton 3 Carlisle 1; Fulham 1 Swindon 0; Huddersfield 0 West Bromwich 2; Leicester 2 Swansea 1; Middlesbrough 0 Manchester City 1; Millwall 1 Derby 1; MK Dons 1 Burnley 2; Nottingham Forest 0 Birmingham 0; Plymouth 0 Newcastle 0; Portsmouth 1 Coventry 1; Preston 7 Colchester 0; Reading 1 Liverpool 1; Scunthorpe 1 Barnsley 0; Sheffield Wednesday 1 Crystal Palace 2; Southampton 1 Luton 0; Stoke 3 York 1; Sunderland 3 Barrow 0; Torquay 0 Brighton 1; Tottenham 4 Peterborough 0; Wigan 4 Hull 1.
Jan 3: Chelsea 5 Watford 0; Manchester United 0 Leeds 1; Sheffield United 1 QPR 1; Tranmere 0 Wolverhampton 1; West Ham 1 Arsenal 2.

Still to play: Accrington v Gillingham; Brentford v Doncaster; Bristol City v Cardiff; Notts County v Forest Green

FRANCE

Wednesday, December 2
Boulogne 2 (Ducatel 36, Ramare pen 82)
Paris Saint-Germain 5 (Chantome 61, Luyindula pen 63, Erdinc 67, 70, Maurice 86) Att: 7,000

Saturday, December 5
Bordeaux 1 (Prasil 24)
Paris Saint-Germain 0 Att: 32,826

Montpellier 2 (Ait-Fana 12, Compan 73)
Le Mans 1 (Le Tallec 62) Att: 13,272

Nice 1 (Coulibaly 31)
Marseille 3 (Niang 19, Gonzalez 77, Kone 86) Att: 15,047

Rennes 1 (Sow 3)
Lorient 0 Att: 24,459

Saint-Etienne 0
Sochaux 0 Att: 21,518

Valenciennes 3 (Decourtioux 27, Samassa 85, Ben Khalifallah 90)
Monaco 1 (Nene pen 50) Att: 12,466

Sunday, December 6
Auxerre 1 (Birsa 35)
Nancy 3 (Andre Luiz 25, Ouaddou 51, Hadji 87) Att: 10,483

Boulogne 2 (Kanuru 40, Sartre og 45)
Lens 1 (Dembele og 22) Att: 13,719

Grenoble 1 (Dieuze 80)
Toulouse 0 Att: 13,865

Lille 4 (Frau 24, Knaussl 53, 90, Cabaye pen 70)
Lyon 3 (Lopez 2, pen 22, 35) Att: 14,031

Thursday, December 10
Lille 4 (Frau 33, Cabaye pen 58, Knaussl 72, Rami 82)
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 13,592

Toulouse 2 (Elgnan 49, 51)
Sochaux 0 Att: 12,152

Saturday, December 12
Le Mans 2 (Cordria 29, Le Tallec 90)
Valenciennes 1 (Dauer 33) Att: 7,700

Lens 2 (Akale 18, Maouhida 36)
Nice 0 Att: 30,605

Lorient 0
Auxerre 0 Att: 9,088

Marseille 2 (Heinze 48, Taiwo pen 54)
Boulogne 0 Att: 47,575

Nancy 1 (Ferel 41)
Rennes 2 (Traore og 49, Marveaux 76) Att: 16,029

Sunday, December 13
Lyon 0
Bordeaux 1 (Chamakh 86) Att: 36,887

Monaco 0
Lille 4 (De Melo 39, 55, Cabaye pen 72, Aubameyang 85) Att: 6,323

Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Luyindula 11, Sessegnon 13, Erdinc 39)
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 36,462

Sochaux 1 (Mikari 29)
Grenoble 0 Att: 10,606

Toulouse 0
Montpellier 1 (Camara 11) Att: 17,569

Tuesday, December 15
Valenciennes 0
Auxerre 0 Att: 10,946

Wednesday, December 16
Le Mans 1 (Helstad 7)
Grenoble 0 Att: 8,020

Lorient 1 (Vahirua pen 53)
Marseille 2 (Ayew 68, Diawara 90) Att: 11,634

Lyon 2 (Pjanic 72, Delgado 90)
Boulogne 0 Att: 37,512

Monaco 1 (Park 20)
Rennes 0 Att: 5,555

Montpellier 0
Bordeaux 1 (Jussie 57) Att: 26,366

Nancy 2 (Ferel 50, Malonga 52)
Nice 0 Att: 15,328

Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Makelele 70)
Lens 1 (Maouhida 74) Att: 47,257

Saturday, December 19
Bordeaux 4 (Bellion 12, 42, Cavenaghi 52, Gourcuff 75)
Lorient 1 (Gameiro 88) Att: 27,599

Grenoble 1 (Dieuze 75)
Nice 1 (Ben Sassia 84) Att: 13,623

Montpellier 0
Nancy 2 (Bakar 32, Berenguer 39)

Rennes 1 (Bengoura 40)
Paris Saint-Germain 0 Att: 26,621

Saint-Etienne 0
Marseille 0 Att: 27,614

Valenciennes 0
Lens 0 Att: 13,720

Sunday, December 20
Auxerre 1 (Contout 90)
Toulouse 1 (Cuati 21)

Lille 3 (Chedjou 12, Knaussl 27, Hazard 29)
Le Mans 0 Att: 13,501

Monaco 1 (Park 35)
Lyon 1 (Michel Bastos 22) Att: 8,620

Tuesday, December 22
Lens 1 (Eduardo pen 90)
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 33,971

Wednesday, December 23
Le Mans 1 (Le Tallec 36)
Monaco 1 (Park 50) Att: 6,661

Lorient 3 (Ansaifitano 24, 46, Sosa 67)
Valenciennes 2 (Audel 5, Damic 35) Att: 10,991

Lyon 1 (Gomis 83)
Montpellier 2 (Montano 53, Marveaux 86) Att: 37,963

Dutch Cup. However, the Uruguayan also picked up his second yellow card of the competition and will therefore miss the quarter-final against NEC Nijmegen.

Meanwhile, Groningen have announced that former Holland winger Peter Huistra, who spent five years in Scotland with Rangers, will take over as coach when long-serving Ron Jans leaves in the summer.

Six appeal...Suarez

ICELAND

Reds kop FH kid

FH Hafnarfjordur midfielder Kristjan Gauti Emilsson, 16, has joined Liverpool. He has represented Iceland at under-17, under-18 and under-19 level.

ISRAEL

DVT for midfield star

Serbian midfielder Nemanja Vucicevic, who joined Hapoel Tel Aviv after a two-season spell in Germany with Koln, has been diagnosed as suffering with deep-vein thrombosis. The 30-year-old's condition has been described by his club coach, Eli Gutman, as "very serious".

Maccabi Haifa still have just one game spoiling their 100 per cent record – a 1-0 defeat at Maccabi Tel Aviv in November being the only league game they haven't won.

Serious...Vucicevic

Marseille 0
Auxerre 2 (Diaco 41, 79) Att: 49,966

Nancy 0
Lille 4 (Hazard 42, Kouassi 51, 72, Frau pen 60) Att: 15,648

Nice 2 (Pote 67, 86)
Boulogne 2 (Perrinelle 58, Blayac 73) Att: 7,656

Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Luyindula 9, Armand 16, Erdinc 65, Jallet 80)
Grenoble 0 Att: 32,546

Sochaux 2 (Dalmat 45, Butin 61)
Rennes 0 Att: 10,581

Toulouse 1 (Machado 4)
Bordeaux 2 (Chamakh 8, Wendel 75) Att: 28,352

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bordeaux	19	14	1	4	32	12	43
Lille	19	10	4	5	37	19	34
Montpellier	18	10	3	5	26	21	33
Marseille	18	8	5	4	30	20	32
Auxerre	19	8	5	5	19	15	32
Lyon	19	8	6	5	31	26	30
PSG	19	8	5	6	31	18	29
Lorient	19	8	5	6	29	22	29
Rennes	19	8	5	6	24	18	29
Valenciennes	19	8	4	7	30	26	28
Monaco	18	8	3	7	20	22	27
Nancy	19	8	2	9	26	29	26
Lens	19	7	5	7	19	24	26
Toulouse	19	7	4	8	19	16	25
Sochaux	17	6	1	8	17	21	25
Nice	19	6	4	9	20	32	22
Le Mans	19	4	4	11	17	28	16
Saint-Etienne	19	4	4	11	11	26	16
Boulogne	18	3	4	11	15	35	13
Grenoble	19	1	4	14	10	33	7

LEADING GOALSCORERS
11 Gervais Yao Kouassi (Lille)
10 Nene (Monaco)
9 Pierre-Alain Frau (Lille)
8 Kevin Gameiro (Lorient)
8 Asamoah Gyan (Rennes)
8 Lisandro Lopez (Lyon)

GERMANY

Friday, December 4
Bayern Munich 2 (Gomez 19, Badstuber 75)
Monchengladbach 1 (Brouwers 28) Att: 69,000

Saturday, December 5
Borussia Dortmund 4 (Grosskreutz 8, Barrios 13, Zidan 38, Hummels 82)
Nurnberg 0 Att: 72,100

Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Franz 26, Meier 90)
Mainz 0 Att: 51,500

Hamburg 0
1899 Hoffenheim 0 Att: 52,725

Hannover 0
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 34,341

Stuttgart 1 (Tasci 63)
Bochum 1 (Fuchs 88) Att: 40,000

Wolfsburg 2 (Basilians og 27, Johnson 81)
Freiburg 2 (Idrissou 19, Banovic pen 51) Att: 27,822

Sunday, December 6
Koln 0
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 50,000

Schalke 2 (Kuranyi 58, Rafinha pen 90)
Hertha Berlin 0 Att: 60,001

Friday, December 11
Hertha Berlin 2 (Ramos 8, 90+)
Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Kroos 76, Kaplan 90) Att: 40,474

Saturday, December 12
Bochum 1 (Fuchs 76)
Bayern Munich 5 (Gomez 23, Mavraj og 33, Olic 43, 50, Pranjic 58) Att: 30,749

Freiburg 0
Koln 0 Att: 24,000

1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Salihovic pen 9)
Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Schwegler 61) Att: 30,150

Monchengladbach 5 (Hagui og 15, og 90, Friend 22, Djakpa og 56, Bradley 68)
Hannover 3 (Ya Konan 36, 68, Schulz 87) Att: 43,528

Nurnberg 0
Hamburg 4 (Elia 47, 74, Jansen 60, Torun 66) Att: 44,865

Werder Bremen 0
Schalke 2 (Kuranyi 47, Moravek 72) Att: 37,000

Sunday, December 13
Mainz 1 (Polanski pen 90)
Stuttgart 1 (Pogrebnyak 11) Att: 20,300

Wolfsburg 1 (Grafite 55)
Borussia Dortmund 3 (Barrios 8, 10, Owomoyela 36) Att: 30,000

Friday, December 18
Schalke 1 (Farfan 12)
Mainz 0 Att: 60,582

Saturday, December 19
Bayer Leverkusen 3 (Kroos 18, 69, Derdiyok 60)
Monchengladbach 2 (Brouwers 37, Dante 54) Att: 30,210

Bayern Munich 5 (Van Buyten 16, Gomez 31, Robben 33, Muller 60, Olic 77)
Hertha Berlin 2 (Ramos 71, Raffael 90) Att: 69,000

Borussia Dortmund 1 (Barrios 19)
Freiburg 0 Att: 80,100

Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Franz 26, Meier 79)
Wolfsburg 2 (Dzeko 37, Josue 69) Att: 41,700

Hannover 2 (Schlaudraff 6, 33)
Bochum 3 (Freier 51, Epalle 54, Fuchs 86) Att: 33,875

Stuttgart 3 (Marica pen 32, Cacau 66, Khedira 82)
1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Maicosuel 44) Att: 41,000

Sunday, December 20
Hamburg 2 (Mathijsen 9, Jansen 36)
Werder Bremen 1 (Naldo 90) Att: 57,000

Koln 3 (Geromel 37, Novakovic 70, 77)
Nurnberg 0 Att: 44,500

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B Leverkusen	17	9	8	0	35	13	35
Schalke	17	10	4	3	28	13	34
Bayern	17	9	6	2	34	15	33
Hamburg	17	8	3	6	34	19	31
B Dortmund	17	8	6	3	23	17	30
Werder	17	7	7	3	32	16	28
Hoffenheim	17	7	4	6	27	17	25
Wolfsburg	17	6	6	5	32	32	24
Mainz	17	6	6	5	21	22	24
E Frankfurt	17	6	6	5	22	24	24
M'gladbach	17	6	3	8	24	29	21
Koln	17	4	6	7	10	15	18
Freiburg	17	5	3	9	19	33	18
Hannover	17	4	5	8	21	27	17
Stuttgart	17	3	7	7	16	23	16
Bochum	17	4	4	9	18	33	16
Nurnberg	17	3	3	11	12	32	12
Hertha Berlin	17	1	3	13	13	39	6

LEADING GOALSCORERS
12 Stefan Kiessling (Bayer Leverkusen)
9 Lucas Barrios (Borussia Dortmund)
8 Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)
8 Kevin Kuranyi (Schalke)
7 Edin Dzeko (Wolfsburg)

GREECE

Dec 2: Ergotelis 0 Larisa 0.
Dec 5: Levadiakos 0 Aris 2; PAOK 1 Larisa 0; Xanthi 0 Olympiakos 1.
Dec 6: Panthrakikos 0 Asteras 0; Giannina 2 Iraklis 3; Ergotelis 1 Kavala 0; Panathinaikos 3 Atromitos 1; Panionios 3 AEK 1.
Dec 12: Aris 0 Asteras 1; Giannina 1 Ergotelis 0; Iraklis 0 Panathinaikos 1.
Dec 13: Atromitos 1 Xanthi 0; Larisa 2 Panionios 2; Kavala 0 PAOK 0; Olympiakos 3 Panthrakikos 0; AEK 3 Levadiakos 2.
Dec 19: Ergotelis 0 PAOK 2; Levadiakos 3 Larisa 0; Panathinaikos 4 Giannina 0.
Dec 20: Panionios 1 Kavala 2; Panthrakikos 0 Atromitos 3; Asteras 2 AEK 0; Aris 1 Olympiakos 0; Xanthi 4 Iraklis 3.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panathinaikos	15	12	2	1	29	9	38
Olympiakos	15	11	3	1	25	7	36
PAOK	15	8	4	3	19	8	28
Asteras	15	6	5	4	17	14	23
Panionios	15	6	4	5	22	16	22
Kavala	15	6	4	5	15	12	22
Aris	15	5	7	3	15	14	22
Ergotelis	15	5	6	4	16	15	21
AEK	15	6	3	6	19	20	21
Atromitos	15	5	4	6	16	16	19
Xanthi	15	5	2	8	11	15	17
Iraklis	15	4	3	8	16	22	15
Larisa	15	3	6	6	14	22	15
Giannina	15	3	5	7	14	24	14
Levadiakos	15	4	2	9	13	23	14
Panthrakikos	15	0	2	13	7	33	2

HOLLAND

Dec 4: WV 2 Willem II 1; AZ 1 Vitesse 2; Roda JC 1 Den Haag 1; NAC 2 Sparta 2.
Dec 5: Utrecht 2 Ajax 0; RKC 0 PSV 2; Feyenoord 3 Groningen 1; Heracles 3 Heerenveen 1; NEC 3 Twente 4.
Dec 11: Ajax 3 NEC 0.
Dec 12: WV 3 RKC 0; Twente 3 NAC 1; Heerenveen 0 Feyenoord 2; PSV 1 AZ 0.
Dec 13: Vitesse 2 Utrecht 2; Willem II 1 Roda JC 3; Den Haag 1 Heracles 4; Sparta 2 Groningen 4.
Dec 18: Heracles 1 WV 0.
Dec 19: AZ 3 Den Haag 0; Feyenoord 1 Willem II 0; RKC 4 Sparta 1.

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Twente	17	15	2	0	38	15	47
PSV	17	14	3	0	43	13	45
Ajax	17	12	2	3	53	15	38
Feyenoord	16	11	4	3	29	15	37
Heracles	18	10	2	6	26	24	32
Utrecht	17	8	6	3	23	16	30
AZ	18	9	1	8	32	21	28
NAC	17	8	4	7	24	26	22
WV	18	4	8	6	25	26	20
Vitesse	17	5	3	9	20	30	18
Sparta	18	5	3	10	19	35	18
Groningen	17	4	5	8	20	26	17
Roda JC	17	4	5	8	23	33	17
Heerenveen	17	5	2	10	17	30	17
Willem II	18	4	2	12	20	34	14
Den Haag	18	3	5	10	18	35	14
NEC	17	2	7	8	19	31	13
RKC	18	4	0	14	16	36	12

HUNGARY

Dec 3: Debrecen 2 MTK 0.

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fehervar	15	10	3	2	36	19	33
Debrecen	15	10	1	4	29	20	31
Ujpest	15	9	2	4	25	18	29
Gyor	15	7	5	3	18	10	26
Zalaegerszeg	15	8	2	5	29	24	26
MTK	15	7	4	4	28	18	25
Papa	15	7	1	7	24	20	22
Kaposvar	15	6	4	5	23	21	22
Paks	15	5	5	5	16	18	20
Vasas	15	6	1	8	23	36	19
Ferencvaros	15	4	5	6	17	21	17
Szombathely	15	4	3	8	21	30	15
Honved	15	3	5	7	16	22	14
Kecskemet	15	4	2	9	27	35	14
Diosgyor	15	3	3	9	18	25	12
Nyiregyhaza	15	2	4	9	19	32	10

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 20/21

ISRAEL

Dec 5: Maccabi Haifa 1 Bnei Sakhnin 0; Ramat Gan 1 Acre 1; Maccabi Petach Tikva 0 Bnei Yehuda 1; Be'er Sheva 2 Hapoel Petach Tikva 0; Beitar 3 Ra'anana 1; Netanya 1 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0.
Dec 6: Ashdod 2 Ahi Nazareth 1.
Dec 7: Hapoel Tel Aviv 2 Hapoel Haifa 0.
Dec 12: Ahi Nazareth 0 Beitar 1; Bnei Yehuda 2 Be'er Sheva 2; Hapoel Haifa 2 Maccabi Petach Tikva 0; Ra'anana 0 Ramat Gan 1; Hapoel Petach Tikva 0 Maccabi Haifa 4.
Dec 13: Bnei Sakhnin 0 Netanya 3.
Dec 14: Maccabi Tel Aviv 2 Ashdod 0.
Dec 19: Ahi Nazareth 3 Maccabi Tel Aviv 3; Maccabi Petach Tikva 2 Acre 3; Be'er Sheva 2 Hapoel Haifa 3; Netanya 1 Hapoel Petach Tikva 0; Ashdod 0 Bnei Sakhnin 0; Beitar 1 Ramat Gan 0.
Dec 20: Maccabi Haifa 2 Bnei Yehuda 0.
Dec 21: Hapoel Tel Aviv 5 Ra'anana 0.
Dec 26: Maccabi Tel Aviv 4 Beitar 3; Bnei Sakhnin 1 Ahi Nazareth 1; Hapoel Petach Tikva 1 Ashdod 1; Acre 1 Be'er Sheva 3; Ra'anana 3 Maccabi Petach Tikva 1; Ramat Gan 0 Hapoel Tel Aviv 3.
Dec 27: Bnei Yehuda 2 Netanya 1.
Dec 28: Hapoel Haifa 0 Maccabi Haifa 1.

New start...Mihajlovic

ITALY
New coaches named

Gianni de Biasi – who has previously coached Brescia, Torino and Spanish club Levante – replaced Pasquale Marino in charge of Udinese, while Catania dismissed their coach, Gianluca Atzori, after a 3-2 defeat at Siena and replaced him with the former Bologna boss Sinisa Mihajlovic.

PORTUGAL
Belenenses enlist the help of Toni

Bottom of the table strugglers Belenenses have dispensed with the services of coach Joao Carlos Pereira. Antonio Conceicao, known as Toni, the 48-year-old Portuguese who was sacked by Romanian side CFR Cluj in November, has agreed to take charge until the end of the season.

Point to prove...Ljajic

RUSSIA
United reject to Rubin

Adem Ljajic – the Serbian teenager whose £10million move from Partizan Belgrade to Manchester United collapsed in December when they decided not to take up an option to sign him – has agreed to join the reigning Russian Premier League champions Rubin Kazan for an undisclosed fee.

Dec 26: Acre 1 Hapoel Tel Aviv 1.
Jan 2: Ra'anana 2 Be'er Sheva 2; Acre 0 Maccabi Haifa 3; Hapoel Haifa 0 Netanya 0; Bnei Yehuda 2 Ashdod 3; Hapoel Petach Tikva 3 Ahi Nazareth 0; Bnei Sakhnin 0 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0.
Jan 3: Ramat Gan 0 Maccabi Petach Tikva 3.
Jan 4: Hapoel Tel Aviv 4 Beitar 3.

ISRAEL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maccabi Haifa	16	15	0	1	35	8	45
H Tel Aviv	16	11	4	1	40	12	37
M Tel Aviv	16	8	5	3	27	16	29
Bnei Yehuda	16	8	4	4	22	14	28
Beitar	16	7	3	6	25	22	24
Ashdod	16	6	6	4	15	15	24
Be'er Sheva	16	6	5	5	29	29	23
Netanya	16	6	4	6	20	16	22
Hapoel Haifa	16	6	2	8	22	23	20
Acre	16	2	9	5	17	22	15
Ramat Gan	16	3	6	7	12	23	15
H Petach Tikva	16	3	5	8	17	24	14
Ra'anana	16	3	5	8	18	30	14
H Petach Tikva	16	3	5	8	13	29	14
Bnei Sakhnin	16	2	7	7	10	19	13
Ahi Nazareth	16	3	2	11	16	38	11

ITALY

Saturday, December 5
Juventus 2 (Chiellini 20, Marchisio 58)
Inter 1 (Eto'o 26) Att: 25,530

Milan 3 (Borriello 1, Seedorf 21, Alexandre Pato 23)
Sampdoria 0 Att: 42,624

Sunday, December 6
Bologna 2 (Adailton 27, Di Vaio pen 65)
Udinese 1 (Di Natale 45)

Fiorentina 2 (Vargas 26, Gilardino 89)
Atalanta 0

Genoa 2 (Palacio 14, Palladino 67)
Parma 2 (Biabiany 36, 59) Att: 25,868

Livorno 0
Chievo 2 (Rigoni 12, Bentivoglio 66) Att: 8,893

Napoli 3 (Quagliarella 54, 88, Maggio 72)
Bari 2 (Barreto 49, Ranocchia 62) Att: 30,000

Palermo 2 (Budan 55, Kjaer 65)
Cagliari 1 (Matri 24) Att: 20,000

Roma 1 (Cassetti 79)
Lazio 0 Att: 54,273

Siena 3 (Calaio 50, Terzi 56, Paolucci 62)
Catania 2 (Martinez 14, 55) Att: 9,000

Saturday, December 12
Bari 3 (Meggiorini 7, Barreto pen 44, Almiron 81)
Juventus 1 (Trezeguet 23) Att: 51,840

Cagliari 3 (Larrivey 75, Matri 80, Jeda 89)
Napoli 3 (Lavezzi 21, Pazienza 65, Bogliacino 90) Att: 15,000

Sunday, December 13
Atalanta 1 (Tiribocchi 81)
Inter 1 (Milito 15) Att: 14,606

Catania 0
Livorno 1 (Danilevicius 88) Att: 12,098

Chievo 2 (Pinzi 12, Sardo 24)
Fiorentina 1 (Montolivo 5) Att: 10,508

Lazio 1 (Kolarov 39)
Genoa 0 Att: 29,488

Milan 0
Palermo 2 (Miccoli 49, Bresciano 62) Att: 39,253

Parma 2 (Panucci 57, Amoruso 86)
Bologna 1 (Mudingayi 43) Att: 17,535

Sampdoria 0
Roma 0 Att: 24,073

Siena 2 (Maccarone 66, Ghezzal 90)
Udinese 1 (D'Agostino 90+) Att: 9,248

Sunday, December 20
Inter 1 (Eto'o 14)
Lazio 0 Att: 52,859

Juventus 1 (Salihamidzic 66)
Catania 2 (Martinez pen 23, Izco 87) Att: 21,327

Livorno 3 (Rivas 39, Danilevicius 47, 90)
Sampdoria 1 (Cassano 15) Att: 9,371

Napoli 2 (Hamsik pen 7, Quagliarella 87)
Chievo 0 Att: 31,973

Palermo 1 (Cavani 40)
Siena 0 Att: 19,221

Roma 2 (Burdisso 48, Brighi 90)
Parma 0 Att: 36,899

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	17	12	3	2	36	14	39
Milan	16	9	4	3	23	17	31
Juventus	17	9	3	5	30	21	30
Roma	17	8	4	5	27	22	28
Parma	17	8	4	5	22	22	28
Napoli	17	7	6	4	26	24	27
Palermo	17	7	5	5	22	20	26
Sampdoria	17	7	4	6	21	25	25
Bari	16	6	6	4	19	15	24
Fiorentina	16	7	3	6	18	15	24
Genoa	16	7	3	6	28	27	24
Chievo	17	7	3	7	20	19	24
Cagliari	16	7	2	7	25	21	23
Udinese	16	5	3	8	19	21	18
Livorno	17	5	3	9	10	19	18
Lazio	17	3	7	7	10	16	16
Bologna	16	4	4	8	17	24	16
Atalanta	16	3	4	9	15	25	13
Catania	17	2	6	9	16	26	12
Siena	17	3	3	11	17	26	12

LEADING GOALSCORERS

11	Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)
10	Diego Milito (Inter)
9	Francesco Totti (Roma)
8	Samuel Eto'o (Inter)
8	Marek Hamsik (Napoli)
8	Alessandro Matri (Cagliari)
8	Giampaolo Pazzini (Sampdoria)

ITALIAN CUP – last 16
Dec 16: Inter 1 Livorno 0.

Still to play: Fiorentina v Chievo; Genoa v Catania; Juventus v Napoli; Lazio v Palermo; Milan v Novara; Roma v Triestina; Udinese v Lumezzane

LATVIA

LATVIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Metalurgs	32	25	4	3	86	23	79
Ventspils	32	23	5	4	89	21	74
Skonto	32	23	4	5	96	30	73
Jurmala	32	12	4	16	42	60	40
Olimps/RFS	32	11	5	16	53	60	38
Blazma	32	7	5	20	30	71	26
Tranzits	32	2	10	20	22	65	16
Daugava (R)	32	3	5	24	26	118	14

Dinaburg expelled from league for alleged match-fixing; all fixtures after decision was taken were awarded as 3-0 wins to their opponents.

Promoted: Jelgava, Jaunkla (after beating Daugava in a play-off)

MACEDONIA

Dec 5: Rabotnicki 1 Turnovo 0.
Dec 6: Renova 1 Pelister 0; Milano 1 Sileks 4; Metalurg 4 Teteks 0; Pobeda 2 Vardar 1.
Dec 9: Pobeda 0 Renova 4; Teteks 6 Milano 0; Sileks 2 Rabotnicki 0; Turnovo 4 Pelister 3.
Dec 12: Rabotnicki 3 Teteks 1.
Dec 13: Renova 3 Turnovo 2; Pelister 1 Sileks 1; Metalurg 3 Vardar 0 (awarded).

MACEDONIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Renova	17	13	3	1	39	13	42
Rabotnicki	18	11	4	3	34	15	37
Metalurg	17	7	7	3	25	14	28
Turnovo	17	7	3	7	25	23	24
Pelister	17	6	5	6	19	19	23
Sileks	17	6	5	6	22	22	23
Pobeda*	16	6	4	6	20	24	19
Teteks	16	5	2	9	21	23	17
Vardar	16	3	4	9	17	25	13
Milano	17	1	0	16	8	63	3
Makedonija**	11	5	5	1	23	5	0
Sloga**	11	3	2	6	9	16	0

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 27/28
3pts deducted for not paying a debt to a former player
***Makedonija and Sloga were expelled from the league after failing to fulfil two consecutive fixtures; forfeited all points gained*

MOLDOVA

Dec 3: Sheriff 3 Zimbru 0.

MOLDOVA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sheriff	18	14	2	2	42	5	44
Dacia	19	13	3	3	38	13	42
Iskra-Stal	19	13	3	3	28	14	42
Olimpia	18	8	5	5	26	14	29
CSCA-Rapid	19	7	4	8	19	29	25
Zimbru	18	6	6	6	22	22	24
Tiraspol	19	5	7	7	14	17	22
Viitorul	19	6	4	9	15	25	22
Academia	19	5	6	8	19	26	21
Dinamo	18	5	2	12	22	41	17
S Gheorghe	18	4	2	12	16	30	14
Nistru	19	2	4	13	8	34	10

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 27/28

POLAND

Dec 4: Zaglebie 0 Legia 0.
Dec 5: Cracovia 1 Slask 0; Belchatow 2 Polonia Bytom 2; Odra 2 Jagiellonia 2; Lech 1 Piast 1.
Dec 6: Ruch 1 Wisla 3; Polonia Warsaw 1 Korona 1.
Dec 11: Piast 1 Ruch 2; Wisla 1 Zaglebie 0.
Dec 12: Lechia 1 Cracovia 0; Lech 2 Korona 0; Polonia Bytom 1 Odra 1; Slask 1 Polonia Warsaw 0.
Dec 13: Legia 1 Arka 0; Jagiellonia 2 Belchatow 1.

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wisla	17	13	1	3	31	13	40
Legia	17	10	5	2	22	7	35
Lech	17	9	5	3	27	16	32
Ruch	17	10	2	5	23	16	32
Belchatow	17	8	4	5	20	15	28
Lechia	17	7	5	5	16	15	26
Polonia B	17	6	6	5	20	16	24
Slask	17	6	5	6	19	17	23
Cracovia	17	5	5	7	13	20	20
Jagiellonia*	17	6	8	3	20	16	16
Piast	17	4	4	9	21	29	16
Arka	17	3	6	8	14	18	15
Korona	17	3	6	8	21	30	15
Polonia W	17	4	3	10	13	25	15
Zaglebie	17	3	5	9	12	26	14
Odra	17	3	2	12	13	28	11

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 27/28
**10pts deducted for the club's involvement in a corruption scandal*

PORTUGAL

Dec 4: Guimaraes 1 Porto 4.
Dec 5: Naval 1 Pacos Ferreira 0; Rio Ave 0 Belenenses 0; Leixoes 1 Sporting Braga 1.
Dec 6: Maritimo 5 Olhanense 2; Benfica 4 Academica 0.
Dec 7: Uniao Leiria 1 Nacional 2; Setubal 0 Sporting Lisbon 2.
Dec 11: Pacos Ferreira 2 Nacional 1.
Dec 12: Sporting Lisbon 0 Uniao Leiria 1; Olhanense 2 Benfica 2.
Dec 13: Maritimo 0 Rio Ave 1; Academica 2 Leixoes 0; Sporting Braga 0 Naval 0; Porto 2 Setubal 0.
Dec 14: Belenenses 0 Guimaraes 1.
Dec 18: Pacos Ferreira 0 Sporting Braga 1.
Dec 19: Guimaraes 1 Rio Ave 0; Naval 0 Sporting Lisbon 1.
Dec 20: Nacional 4 Academica 3; Uniao Leiria 1 Belenenses 0; Setubal 3 Maritimo 2; Benfica 1 Porto 0.
Dec 21: Leixoes 2 Olhanense 2.

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica	14	10	3	1	38	9	33
S Braga	14	10	3	1	19	8	33
Porto	14	9	2	3	27	11	29
Nacional	14	7	3	4	22	24	24
Sporting L	14	5	6	3	15	11	21
Uniao Leiria	14	5	5	4	17	13	20
Maritimo	14	5	4	5	23	19	19
Rio Ave	14	4	7	3	13	11	19
Guimaraes	14	5	4	5	13	15	19
Naval	14	4	3	7	9	17	15
P Ferreira	14	3	5	6	12	15	14
Academica	14	3	4	7	16	23	13
Setubal	14	3	2	9	7	27	11
Leixoes	14	2	5	7	13	25	11
Olhanense	14	1	7	6	11	21	10
Belenenses	14	1	7	6	7	17	10

Best ever...Boyd

SCOTLAND

Boyd breaks record

Kris Boyd, who has reversed his decision to retire from international football, scored five goals in Rangers' 7-1 thrashing of Dundee United to break Henrik Larsson's record as the Scottish Premier League's top goalscorer.

Boyd has now scored 158 times in the top flight.

Motherwell sacked manager Jim Cannon, saying he "repeatedly refused to sign a contract". Former Scotland manager Craig Brown and his assistant Archie Knox agreed to take temporary control.

SPAIN

Ronaldo sees red

Cristiano Ronaldo was sent off in the final minute of Real Madrid's 4-2 victory over Almeria. The striker was booked for removing his shirt scoring his side's fourth goal – his first goal since returning after two months out with an ankle injury – and received a second yellow for reacting to provocation and kicking Almeria's Juanma Ortiz.

Meanwhile, Ronaldo's team-mate Pepe will miss the rest of this season. The Portuguese central defender tore knee ligaments during the 3-2 win at Valencia.

Marching orders...Ronaldo

ROMANIA

Dec 1: Otelul 3 Astra 2.
Dec 6: Ceahlaul 2 Urziceni 3.
Dec 8: Politehnica 0 Gloria 0; Rapid 2 Brasov 1.
Dec 9: Alba Iulia 0 Gaz Metan 0; Vaslui 1 Otelul 1; Timisoara 1 Pandurii 0.
Dec 7: International 0 CFR 1; Universitatea 1 Steaua 2.
Dec 8: Astra 1 Dinamo 1.
Dec 11: Pandurii 2 Alba Iulia 0; Gloria 1 Rapid 1.
Dec 12: Otelul 1 Universitatea 0; CFR 2 Ceahlaul 0.
Dec 13: Gaz Metan 0 Astra 0; Steaua 3 International 2; Brasov 1 Timisoara 0; Dinamo 1 Vaslui 1.
Dec 14: Urziceni 2 Politehnica 0.

ROMANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CFR	17	10	4	3	23	10	34
Urziceni	17	10	4	3	25	13	34
Steaua	17	10	4	3	25	14	34
Timisoara	17	8	7	2	29	12	31
Rapid	17	9	4	4	36	21	31
Vaslui	17	9	3	5	25	18	30
Brasov	17	7	6	4	19	11	27
Dinamo	17	7	6	4	19	12	27
Otelul	17	6	4	7	21	24	22
Gaz Metan	17	5	6	6	18	26	21
Pandurii	17	5	5	7	14	17	20
Astra	17	4	6	7	16	23	18
Politehnica	17	5	3	9	19	25	18
Universitatea	17	5	2	10	24	27	17
International	17	5	1	11	16	31	16
Alba Iulia	17	3	5	9	17	27	14
Gloria	17	2	8	7	13	24	14
Ceahlaul	17	2	4	11	13	35	10

League now on winter break

SCOTLAND

Dec 5: Falkirk 1 Rangers 3; Celtic 3 Aberdeen 0; Dundee United 3 St Mirren 2; Hibernian 2 Motherwell 0; St Johnstone 0 Kilmarnock 1.
Dec 6: Hamilton 2 Hearts 1.
Dec 12: Motherwell 2 Celtic 3; Aberdeen 1 Hamilton 2; Hearts 0 Dundee United 0; Kilmarnock 1 Hibernian 1; Rangers 3 St Johnstone 0; St Mirren 1 Falkirk 1.
Dec 16: Dundee United 0 Rangers 3.
Dec 19: Aberdeen 0 Hibernian 2; Kilmarnock 1 Falkirk 2; Rangers 6 Motherwell 1; St Johnstone 1 St Mirren 0.
Dec 20: Hearts 2 Celtic 1.
Dec 26: Celtic 2 Hamilton 0; Dundee United 0 Kilmarnock 0; Falkirk 0 Hearts 1; Motherwell 1 St Johnstone 3.
Dec 27: Hibernian 1 Rangers 4.
Dec 30: Hearts 1 Motherwell 0; Rangers 7 Dundee United 1.
Jan 2: Dundee United 0 Aberdeen 1; St Mirren 1 Kilmarnock 0.
Jan 3: Celtic 1 Rangers 1; Hibernian 1 Hearts 1.

SCOTLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers	19	13	5	1	47	13	44
Celtic	18	11	4	3	37	19	37
Hibernian	18	9	6	3	26	15	33
Dundee Utd	18	7	7	4	22	23	28
Hearts	19	6	6	7	18	20	24
Aberdeen	17	5	6	6	13	18	21
Motherwell	18	4	8	6	21	29	20
St Johnstone	17	5	4	8	24	30	19
St Mirren	17	4	5	8	19	25	17
Hamilton	18	4	4	8	15	26	16
Kilmarnock	18	3	5	10	12	23	14
Falkirk	17	2	6	9	14	27	12

SERBIA

Dec 6: Vojvodina 0 Javor 1; Cukaricki 1 Mladi Radnik 1; BSK 0 Red Star 1; Spartak 2 Smederevo 0; Jagodina 3 Metalac 1.
Dec 8: Hajduk 2 Borac 0; Rad 2 Napredak 1; Partizan 3 OFK 0.
Dec 12: Metalac 1 Rad 1; Smederevo 2 Jagodina 0; OFK 0 BSK 2; Mladi Radnik 1 Partizan 1; Borac 2 Cukaricki 1; Javor 1 Hajduk 1; Red Star 5 Spartak 2.
Dec 13: Napredak 2 Vojvodina 0.

SERBIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star	15	12	1	2	29	6	40
Partizan	15	11	4	0	31	10	37
Vojvodina	15	7	3	5	21	10	24
OFK	15	7	3	5	17	13	24
Spartak	15	6	5	4	19	13	23
Jagodina	15	6	3	6	18	16	21
Javor	15	4	7	4	11	12	19
Smederevo	15	5	4	6	15	18	19
Borac	15	6	1	8	13	19	19
Hajduk	15	4	5	6	16	18	17
Napredak	15	4	4	7	14	19	16
BSK	15	4	4	7	11	18	16
Mladi Radnik	15	3	7	5	10	18	16
Rad	15	3	6	6	14	19	15
Metalac	15	4	3	8	8	19	15
Cukaricki	15	2	2	11	10	27	8

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 27/28

SLOVAKIA

Dec 5: Ruzomberok 2 Kosice 0; Petrzalka 2 Spartak 1; DAC 2 Nitra 2; Tatran 1 Zilina 0; Dubnica 0 Slovan 1.
Dec 6: Dukla 1 Senica 0.

SLOVAKIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zilina	19	13	2	4	27	9	41
Slovan	19	12	4	3	30	14	40
Dukla	19	11	6	2	28	13	39
Nitra	19	8	4	7	21	17	28
Senica	19	7	5	7	16	23	26
Spartak	19	7	4	8	27	23	25
Tatran	19	7	3	9	17	18	24
Ruzomberok	19	6	5	8	18	23	23
Petrzalka	19	6	4	9	22	23	22
DAC	19	5	7	7	18	21	22
Dubnica	19	4	5	10	13	26	17
Kosice	19	2	3	14	15	42	9

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of March 6/7

SLOVENIA

Dec 2: Olimpija 0 Rudar 1; Koper 0 Interblock 0; Maribor 1 Nafta 2; Domzale 2 Gorica 3; Celje 3 Drava 0.
Dec 5: Nafta 2 Celje 1; Interblock 2 Domzale 1; Gorica 1 Olimpija 1.
Dec 6: Drava 1 Koper 1; Rudar 0 Maribor 2.
Dec 9: Nafta 1 Drava 0; Interblock 0 Celje 0; Rudar 0 Domzale 2; Gorica 1 Koper 2; Maribor 2 Olimpija 1.
Dec 12: Koper 4 Celje 0; Maribor 1 Interblock 0.

SLOVENIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Koper	22	12	7	3	33	21	43
Maribor	22	12	2	8	38	28	38
Nafta	22	10	4	8	35	35	34
Rudar	22	10	2	10	29	32	32
Olimpija*	22	10	3	9	31	21	31
Celje	22	6	6	8	33	34	30
Domzale	22	8	5	9	31	38	29
Interblock	22	7	5	10	25	27	26
Gorica	22	6	6	10	34	37	24
Drava	22	4	6	12	19	35	18

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of March 6/7
**2pts deducted for missing a game last season*

SPAIN

Wednesday, December 2

Xerez 0
Barcelona 2 (Henry 46, Ibrahimovic 90) Att: 17,584

Saturday, December 5

Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Adrian 39)
Barcelona 3 (Messi 27, 79, Ibrahimovic 88) Att: 34,000

Real Madrid 4 (Sergio Ramos 31, Higuain 73, Benzema 82, Cristiano Ronaldo 84)
Almeria 2 (Soriano 58, Uche 62) Att: 77,000

Sevilla 1 (Luis Fabiano pen 45)
Valladolid 1 (Manucho 33) Att: 42,000

Xerez 0
Atletico Madrid 2 (Forlan 29, Aguero 65) Att: 17,805

Sunday, December 6

Athletic Bilbao 1 (Munitain 57)
Valencia 2 (Villa 61, Mathieu 82) Att: 37,500

Espanyol 0
Racing Santander 4 (Henrique 47, Canales 52, 72, Tchite pen 68) Att: 25,180

Malaga 1 (Apono 82)
Osasuna 1 (Shojaei 47) Att: 25,000

Mallorca 4 (Aduriz 38, 68, Mario Suarez 75, Keita 83)
Zaragoza 1 (Ander Herrera 86) Att: 12,600

Tenerife 2 (Ricardo 55, Nino 66)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Diego Castro 4) Att: 19,281

Villarreal 3 (Capdevila 17, 86, Cazorla 67)
Getafe 2 (Pedro Leon 3, Soldado pen 52) Att: 18,000

Saturday, December 12

Barcelona 1 (Ibrahimovic pen 39)
Espanyol 0 Att: 84,759

Valencia 2 (Villa 59, Joaquin 80)
Real Madrid 3 (Higuain 54, 85, Garay 83) Att: 50,000

Zaragoza 1 (Diego 90)
Athletic Bilbao 2 (San Jose 61, Susaeta 81) Att: 23,000

Sunday, December 13

Almeria 1 (Uche 58)
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Pablo Alvarez 74) Att: 9,360

Atletico Madrid 1 (Simao 37)
Villarreal 2 (Fuster 49, Llorente 90) Att: 42,000

Getafe 2 (Nilsin 37, 68)
Tenerife 1 (Juanlu 81) Att: 11,000

Osasuna 0
Mallorca 1 (Castro 61) Att: 16,088

Racing Santander 3 (Lacen 26, Arana 49, Xisco 82)
Xerez 2 (Bermejo 3, Antonito 69) Att: 14,439

Sporting Gijon 0
Sevilla 1 (Kanoute 9) Att: 17,000

Valladolid 1 (Gamez og 69)
Malaga 1 (Doda 34) Att: 13,435

Saturday, December 19

Athletic Bilbao 2 (Yeste 1, Llorente 12)
Osasuna 0 Att: 38,000

Real Madrid 6 (Higuain 3, 34, Van der Vaart 26, 28, Cristiano Ronaldo 56, Benzema 71)
Zaragoza 0 Att: 60,000

Sevilla 1 (Negredo 51)
Getafe 2 (Soldado 12, 33) Att: 38,000

Sunday, December 20

Deportivo La Coruna 0
Valencia 0 Att: 30,000

Espanyol 2 (Marquez 45, Coro 81)
Almeria 0 Att: 22,275

Malaga 2 (Fernando 24, Forestieri 77)
Mallorca 1 (Julio Alvarez 56)

Tenerife 1 (Nino 3)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Jurado 22) Att: 21,414

Valladolid 2 (Rivaldo 29, Medunjanin 90)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Luis Moran 13) Att: 16,765

Villarreal 2 (Llorente 50, Rossi 72)
Racing Santander 0 Att: 18,000

Saturday, January 2

Atletico Madrid 2 (Dragutinovic og 46, Antonio Lopez 90)
Sevilla 1 (Renato 44) Att: 35,000

Barcelona 1 (Pedro 7)
Villarreal 1 (Fuster 51) Att: 77,622

Valencia 1 (Zigic 90)
Espanyol 0 Att: 45,000

Sunday, January 3

Almeria 1 (Ortiz 89)
Xerez 0 Att: 9,574

Getafe 1 (Casquero 83)
Valladolid 0 Att: 9,000

Mallorca 2 (Julio Alvarez 49, Aduriz 66)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 12,800

Osasuna 0
Real Madrid 0 Att: 18,000

Racing Santander 2 (Colsa 72, Xisco 75)
Tenerife 0 Att: 15,274

Big opportunity...Larsson

Summer move...Doumbia (right)

SWEDEN

Allback and Larsson turn to coaching

Ogryte's former Sweden striker Marcus Allback, who also played for Heerenveen and Aston Villa, has hung up his boots at the age of 36 to become assistant to national team coach Erik Hamren.

Another former international striker, ex-Celtic and Barcelona star Henrik Larsson, has taken his first coaching job, in charge of second division side Landskrona BoIS.

SWITZERLAND

Doumbia heads east

Young Boys striker Seydou Doumbia, who is the league's top scorer with 17 goals, has agreed to join CSKA Moscow on a five-year contract at the end of the season.

TURKEY

Frenchman given Ankaragucu job

Roger Lemerre, who was coach of the France side that won the European Championship in 2000, has taken charge of struggling Ankaragucu.

Former Turkey and Fenerbahce defender Umit Ozat was named as Lemerre's assistant.

Sporting Gijon 2 (Gregory 45, Canella 69)
Malaga 2 (Duda 9, Wellington 60) Att: 19,800

Zaragoza 0
Deportivo La Coruna 0 Att: 22,000

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	16	12	4	0	37	10	40
Real Madrid	16	12	2	2	40	13	38
Valencia	16	9	5	2	28	16	32
Mallorca	16	9	3	4	30	16	30
Sevilla	16	9	3	4	27	15	30
Dep Coruna	16	8	4	4	19	16	28
Getafe	16	9	0	7	26	22	27
Ath Bilbao	16	8	2	6	21	20	26
Villarreal	16	6	4	6	25	20	22
Sporting Gijon	16	5	6	5	17	17	21
At Madrid	16	4	5	7	23	26	17
Osasuna	16	4	5	7	14	19	17
Valladolid	16	3	7	6	22	27	16
R Santander	16	4	4	8	19	25	16
Almeria	16	4	4	8	16	26	16
Espanyol	16	4	4	8	10	22	16
Tenerife	16	4	3	9	15	30	15
Malaga	16	2	7	7	19	23	13
Zaragoza	16	3	4	9	17	35	13
Xerez	16	1	4	11	6	29	7

LEADING GOALSCORERS

12 David Villa (Valencia)
11 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Barcelona)
10 Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)
10 Roberto Soldado (Getafe)
9 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
8 Aritz Aduriz (Mallorca)
8 Luis Fabiano (Sevilla)

SWITZERLAND

Dec 5: Sion 2 St Gallen 1; Grasshopper 1 Zurich 0.
Dec 6: Lucerne 6 Aarau 0; Basle 3 Bellinzona 2; Young Boys 1 Xamax 0.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Young Boys	18	13	2	3	43	20	41
Basle	18	10	4	4	41	27	34
Lucerne	18	8	5	5	33	26	29
Xamax	18	7	5	6	34	25	26
Grasshopper	18	6	2	8	31	24	26
Sion	18	7	5	6	29	31	26
Zurich	18	6	5	7	31	29	23
St Gallen	18	6	5	7	26	26	23
Bellinzona	18	4	3	11	25	51	15
Aarau	18	1	4	13	11	45	7

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 6/7

TURKEY

Dec 4: Besiktas 0 Diyarbakirspor 0.
Dec 5: Kasimpasa 2 Sivasspor 2; Eskisehirspor 2 Fenerbahce 1.
Dec 6: Gaziantepspor 1 Antalyaspor 1; Kayserispor 3 Bursaspor 0; Genclerbirligi 2 Denizlispor 0; Trabzonspor 3 Ankaragucu 0; Ankaraspor 0 Manisaspor 3 (awarded); Galatasaray 1 Istanbul BB 1.
Dec 11: Antalyaspor 2 Galatasaray 3.
Dec 12: Fenerbahce 3 Ankaragucu 2.
Dec 13: Istanbul BB 1 Kayserispor 2; Diyarbakirspor 2 Kasimpasa 2; Genclerbirligi 1 Gaziantepspor 1; Sivasspor 2 Eskisehirspor 1; Denizlispor 0 Trabzonspor 1; Bursaspor 3 Ankaraspor 0 (awarded); Manisaspor 1 Besiktas 1.
Dec 18: Besiktas 2 Bursaspor 3.
Dec 19: Gaziantepspor 2 Denizlispor 1; Eskisehirspor 0 Diyarbakirspor 0; Kasimpasa 3 Manisaspor 1; Kayserispor 1 Antalyaspor 2; Ankaragucu 2 Sivasspor 3; Galatasaray 1 Genclerbirligi 0.
Dec 20: Ankaraspor 0 Istanbul BB 3 (awarded); Trabzonspor 0 Fenerbahce 1.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	17	12	1	4	31	17	37
Galatasaray	17	11	3	3	36	21	36
Bursaspor	17	11	2	4	34	17	35
Kayserispor	17	10	4	3	28	13	34
Besiktas	17	9	5	3	20	10	32
Trabzonspor	17	8	3	6	30	21	27
Genclerbirligi	17	7	5	5	23	17	26
Istanbul BB	17	7	5	5	21	25	26
Eskisehirspor	17	6	7	4	21	16	25
Antalyaspor	17	7	3	7	24	21	24
Gaziantepspor	17	6	6	5	22	20	24
Kasimpasa	17	5	5	7	26	28	20
Manisaspor	17	4	8	7	16	19	18
Diyarbakirspor	17	4	6	7	17	25	18
Ankaragucu	17	4	5	8	22	25	17
Sivasspor	17	5	2	10	21	29	17
Denizlispor	17	1	4	12	11	28	7
Ankaraspor	17	0	0	17	0	51	0

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of January 23/24
**Ankaraspor expelled from league for having "anti-competitive" links with Ankaragucu; all fixtures awarded as 3-0 wins to their opponents*

UKRAINE

Dec 4: Chornomorets 0 Dynamo 1; Arsenal 1 Zorya 1; Karpaty 1 Vorskla 0; Metalist 0 Obolon 1; Metalurh Zaporizhya 0 Tavriya 1.
Dec 6: Zakarpattya 0 Illichivets 1; Kryvbas 0 Shakhtar 2; Dnipro 2 Metalurh Donetsk 0.
Dec 8: Shakhtar 2 Metalurh Zaporizhya 0.
Dec 12: Zorya 2 Obolon 0; Arsenal 2 Chornomorets 0; Shakhtar 2 Illichivets 1; Metalist 3 Dnipro 2; Vorskla 2 Zakarpattya 0.
Dec 13: Metalurh Donetsk 1 Karpaty 0; Kryvbas 1 Metalurh Zaporizhya 3; Tavriya 2 Dynamo 3.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	16	13	3	0	36	9	42
Shakhtar	17	12	4	1	40	14	40
Metalist	16	11	2	3	21	9	35
Dnipro	16	8	4	4	25	14	28
Metalurh D	16	8	3	5	25	17	27
Tavriya	16	7	5	4	20	22	26
Karpaty	16	6	6	4	25	21	24
Obolon	16	7	0	9	19	26	21
Arsenal	16	5	5	6	22	22	20
Vorskla	16	4	7	5	17	15	19
Illichivets	16	5	3	8	18	26	18
Metalurh Z	17	4	4	9	18	29	16
Zorya	16	4	3	9	12	28	15
Chornomorets	16	3	3	10	9	23	12
Zakarpattya	16	3	1	12	11	26	10
Kryvbas	16	2	1	13	15	32	7

League now on winter break; resumes weekend of February 27/28

SOUTH AMERICA

SUDAMERICANA CUP

Final, 1st leg

Nov 25
LDU Quito (Ecu) 5 (Mendez 21, 44, 60, Salas 77, De la Cruz 86)
Fluminense (Bra) 1 (Marquinho 1)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)
LDU: Dominguez - W Araujo, Espinola, N Araujo, Reasco, De la Cruz, Mendez (Chila 84), O Calderon, Bolanos (Salas 68), Bieler, W Calderon (Graf 68).
Fluminense: Rafael - Gum, Cassio, Dalton, Mariano (Ruy 71), Diogo, Diguinho (Mauricio 59), Conca, Marquinho, Alan (Kleza 46), Fred.

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 2
Fluminense 3 (Diguinho 13, Fred 43, Gum 71)
LDU Quito 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 85,822. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)
LDU 5-4 on agg
Fluminense: Rafael - Mariano (Mauricio 87), Gum, Dalton, Marquinho, Diogo (Raphael Augusto 67), Diguinho, Conca, Adelisson (Ruy 57), Alan, Fred.
Sent off: Fred 75min.
LDU: Dominguez - N Araujo, Espinola, O Calderon, Reasco, De la Cruz, W Araujo, Campos, Mendez, W Calderon (Larrea 25; Calle 84), Bieler (Bolanos 89).
Sent off: De la Cruz 18min, Campos 82min.

LIBERTADORES CUP

Draw

Preliminary round
Deportivo Tachira (Ven) v Libertad (Par) (1)
Juan Aurich (Per) v Mexican reps – tbc (2)
Colon (Arg) v Universidad Católica (Chl) (3)
Real Potosi (Bol) v Cruzeiro (Bra) (4)
Newell's Old Boys (Arg) v Emelec (Ecu) (5)
Atletico Junior (Col) v Racing (Uru) (6)
1st legs - Jan 26-28; 2nd legs - Feb 2-10

Winners qualify for group stage

Group 1
Cerro Porteno (Par)
Corinthians (Bra)
Independiente Medellin (Col)
Winners of preliminary round game 6

Group 2
Nacional (Par)
Once Caldas (Col)
Sao Paulo (Bra)
Mexican representatives – tbc

Group 3
Alianza Lima (Per)
Bolivar (Bol)
Estudiantes (Arg)
Winners of preliminary round game 2

Group 4
Boconia (Bol)
Lanus (Arg)
Universitario (Per)
Winners of preliminary round game 1

Group 5
Cerro (Uru)
Deportivo Quito (Ecu)
Internacional (Bra)
Winners of preliminary round game 5

Group 6
Banfield (Arg)
Deportivo Cuenca (Ecu)
Morelia (Mex)
Nacional (Uru)

Group 7
Colo Colo (Chl)
Deportivo Italia (Ven)
Velez Sarsfield (Arg)
Winners of preliminary round game 4

Group 8
Caracas (Ven)
Flamengo (Bra)
Universidad de Chile (Chl)
Winners of preliminary round game 3

Games to be played February 9-April 22

Group winners and the six runners-up with the best record qualify for 1st knockout round, to which Guadalajara (Mex) and San Luis (Mex) received byes

ARGENTINA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Thursday, December 3
Estudiantes 0
Chacarita Juniors 0

Friday, December 4
Godoy Cruz 1 (Higuain 90+)
Rosario Central 1 (Biaghieri 90)

Huracan 0
Banfield 1 (Silva 88)

Racing Club 1 (Grazzini 70)
Tigre 0

Saturday, December 5
Argentinos Juniors 2 (Coria 55, Oberman 68)
San Lorenzo 1 (Pintos 19)

Atletico Tucuman 2 (Rodriguez pen 8, 32)
Colon 0

Boca Juniors 1 (Mouche 55)
Independiente 2 (Silvera 25, Piatti 87)

Sunday, December 6
Lanus 2 (Blanco 28, Salcedo 90)
Gimnasia La Plata 0

Newell's Old Boys 1 (Boghossian 7)
Arsenal 2 (Jara 14, Perez 36)

Velez Sarsfield 3 (Moralez 32, Lopez 84, Zarate 90)
River Plate 1 (Diaz 76)

Tuesday, December 8
Colon 1 (Nieto pen 52)
Godoy Cruz 0

Huracan 0
Boca Juniors 0

Independiente 1 (Gandin 80)
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Prosperi 88)

Wednesday, December 9
Banfield 1 (Lopez 85)
Tigre 0

Hospitalised...Buonanotte

ARGENTINA

Buonanotte injured in car accident

River Plate's highly rated midfielder Diego Buonanotte broke his collar bone and damaged a lung when he was involved in a car crash in which three people were killed.

The 21-year-old, who was a member of Argentina's 2008 Olympic gold medal-winning squad, was hurt while holidaying in the Santa Fe prior to returning for pre-season training.

Diego Cana, who led Tigre to joint-first place in the 2008 opening championship, quit as coach after the club finished bottom of last year's apertura.

BOLIVIA

Potosi claim place

Real Potosi won a place in the preliminary round of the Libertadores Cup when they came from 3-1 behind to beat Bolivar 4-3 and win the play-off tournament.

USA

New loan for Donovan

Los Angeles Galaxy striker Landon Donovan, who was named the US Soccer Federation's male athlete of 2009, has joined English side Everton on loan.

Premier chance...Donovan

Gimnasia La Plata 0
Newell's Old Boys 2 (Formica 15, Boghossian 33)

San Lorenzo 0
Lanus 1 (Aguirre og 82)

Thursday, December 10
Arsenal 2 (Granero og 34, Jara 84)
Atletico Tucuman 0

Chacarita Juniors 0
Velez Sarsfield 0

River Plate 2 (Buonanotte pen 32, Abelairas 40)
Racing Club 0

Saturday, December 12
Argentinos Juniors 5 (Ortigoza pen 8, Mercier 40, Hauche 67, 71, 85)
Huracan 1 (Quintana 82)

Lanus 0
Independiente 0

Sunday, December 13
Boca Juniors 2 (Palermo pen 7, 59)
Banfield 0

Newell's Old Boys 0
San Lorenzo 2 (Bottagaray 10, 67)

Racing Club 0
Chacarita Juniors 2 (Parra pen 27, Cano 82)

Tigre 0
River Plate 2 (Funes Mori 45, Buonanotte 59)

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Galindez og 72)
Rosario Central 2 (Zelaya 25, Castillejos 52)

Monday, December 14
Atletico Tucuman 1 (Gigliotti 75)
Gimnasia La Plata 0

Godoy Cruz 0
Arsenal 0

ARGENTINA – OPENING – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Banfield	19	12	5	2	25	11	41
Newell's	19	12	3	4	28	15	39
Colon	19	10	4	5	27	16	34
Independiente	19	10	4	5	30	20	34
Velez	19	10	4	5	29	21	34
Argentinos Jrs	19	8	8	3	29	20	32
San Lorenzo	19	9	5	5	28	20	32
Estudiantes	19	9	4	6	26	19	31
Lanus	19	8	7	4	26	17	31
Rosario	19	8	7	4	21	14	31
Boca Juniors	19	7	6	6	28	24	27
Arsenal	19	7	6	6	20	24	27
At Tucuman	19	6	4	9	24	32	22
River Plate	19	5	6	8	23	26	21
Chacarita Jrs	19	5	4	10	18	25	19
Racing Club	19	4	5	10	17	26	17
Godoy Cruz	19	3	7	9	18	28	16
Gimnasia LP	19	3	4	12	16	29	13
Huracan	19	2	5	12	12	34	11
Tigre	19	2	2	15	18	42	8

TOP GOALSCORERS

14 Santiago Silva (Banfield)
12 Federico Nieto (Colon)
11 Joaquin Boghossian (Newell's Old Boys)
10 Dario Gandin (Independiente)
10 Gabriel Hauche (Argentinos Juniors)
9 Mauro Boselli (Estudiantes)

BRAZIL

Dec 5: Nautico 0 Avai 1; Atletico Mineiro 0 Corinthians 3.
Dec 6: Barueri 0 Atletico Paranaense 0; Santos 1 Cruzeiro 2; Coritiba 1 Fluminense 1; Vitoria 2 Goias 2; Flamengo 2 Gremio 1; Botafogo 2 Palmeiras 1; Internacional 4 Santo Andre 1; Sao Paulo 4 Sport Recife 0.

BRAZIL – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Flamengo	38	19	10	9	58	44	67
Internacional	38	19	8	11	65	44	65
Sao Paulo	38	18	11	9	57	42	65
Cruzeiro	38	18	8	12	56	53	62
Palmeiras	38	17	11	10	58	45	62
Avai	38	15	12	11	81	52	57
At Mineiro	38	16	8	14	55	56	56
Gremio	38	15	10	13	67	46	55
Goias	38	15	10	13	64	65	55
Corinthians	38	14	10	14	50	54	52
Barueri	38	12	13	13	59	52	49
Santos	38	12	13	13	58	58	49
Vitoria	38	13	9	16	51	57	48
At Paranaense	38	13	9	16	42	49	48
Botafogo	38	11	14	13	52	58	47
Fluminense	38	11	13	14	49	56	46
Coritiba (R)	38	12	9	17	48	60	45
Santo Andre (R)	38	11	8	19	46	61	41
Nautico (R)	38	10	8	20	40	71	38
Sport Recife (R)	38	7	10	21	48	71	31

Promoted: Vasco da Gama, Guarani, Ceara, Atletico Goianiense

CHILE

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP Semi-finals

1st legs - Nov 28/29; 2nd legs - Dec 2/3
Colo Colo v Dep La Serena
1-0, 3-0 (agg 4-0)
Santiago Morning v Univ Catolica
0-3, 3-5 (agg 3-8)

Final, 1st leg

Dec 5
Colo Colo 2 (Miralles 10, Zenteno og 75)
Univ Catolica 2 (Mirosevic pen 70, Martinez 89)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Chandia

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 9
Univ Catolica 2 (Valenzuela 1, Gutierrez 65)
Colo Colo 4 (Aranguiz 14, Paredes 33, 67, Bogado 89)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 16,200. **Ref:** Pozo
Colo Colo 6-4 on agg

COLOMBIA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP Play-offs

Group A
Dec 8: Indep Medellin 2 Cartagena 0; Pereira 1 At Junior 2.
Dec 10: Pereira 2 Cartagena 1; At Junior 1 Indep Medellin 2.
Dec 13: Indep Medellin 2 Pereira 2; Cartagena 0 At Junior 0.

COLOMBIA – CLOSING PLAY-OFFS – GP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind Medellin	6	4	2	0	12	6	14
At Junior	6	2	3	1	7	5	9
Pereira	6	1	2	3	9	11	5
Cartagena	6	1	1	4	5	11	4

Group B
Dec 9: Indep Santa Fe 1 At Nacional 1.
Dec 6: At Huila 1 Tolima 1.
Dec 10: Indep Santa Fe 0 Tolima 2; At Nacional 0 At Huila 1.
Dec 13: Tolima 3 At Nacional 4; At Huila 4 Indep Santa Fe 1.

COLOMBIA – CLOSING PLAY-OFFS – GP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Huila	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
At Nacional	6	3	1	2	10	7	10
Ind Santa Fe	6	2	1	3	6	11	7
Tolima	6	1	2	3	9	10	5

Group winners qualified for Final

Final, 1st leg

Dec 16
At Huila 0
Indep Medellin 1 (Martinez 84)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Buitrago

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 20
Indep Medellin 2 (Martinez 68, Mosquera 73)
At Huila 2 (Maturana 42, Ochoa 83)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ruiz
Sent off: Maturana (At Huila) 90min
Indep Medellin 3-2 on agg

ECUADOR

Championship Final, 1st leg

Nov 29
Dep Cuenca 1 (Ianiero 76)
Dep Quito 1 (Pinchi 58)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Alarcon
Sent off: Barghetto (Dep Quito) 71min; Matamoros 72min, Guerron 90min (both Dep Cuenca)
Dep Quito 4-3 on agg

Championship Final, 2nd leg

Dec 5
Dep Quito 3 (D Mina 70, Arroyo 73, 88)
Dep Cuenca 2 (Preciado 80, Villalba 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vera
Sent off: Barghetto (Dep Quito) 71min; Matamoros 72min, Guerron 90min (both Dep Cuenca)
Dep Quito 4-3 on agg

PARAGUAY

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 5: Cerro Porteno 5 Guarani 4; Olimpia 2 2 de Mayo 0; 3 de Febrero 2 Rubio Nu 1.
Dec 6: Sportivo Luqueno 1 Tacuary 1; 12 de Octubre 1 Sol de America 1; Libertad 2 Nacional 1.
Dec 9: Rubio Nu 2 12 de Octubre 1; 2 de Mayo 1 Cerro Porteno 2.
Dec 11: Guarani 2 3 de Febrero 0.
Dec 12: Sol de America 2 Sportivo Luqueno 0.
Dec 13: Nacional 0 Olimpia 0; Tacuary 1 Libertad 0.

PARAGUAY – CLOSING – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
National	22	12	5	5	29	16	41
Libertad	22	12	4	6	31	20	40
Guarani	22	11	5	6	30	21	38
Rubio Nu	22	10	7	5	29	22	37
Olimpia	22	11	2	9	32	22	35
Cerro Porteno	22	9	8	5	28	25	35
Tacuary	22	9	5	8	25	31	32
3 de Febrero	22	7	5	10	24	35	26
Sol America	22	7	4	11	25	30	25
2 de Mayo	22	6	4	12	25	27	22
S Luqueno	22	5	5	12	19	32	20
12 de Octubre	22	5	2	15	17	33	17

PERU

Group stage

Dec 6: Coronel Bolognesi 2 Cienciano 2.
Dec 8: Alianza Lima 2 Cesar Vallejo 2; Huancayo 3 Total Chalaco 0; Melgar 5 Universitario 0; Sport Ancash 1 Sporting Cristal 0; Juan Aurich 3 Colegio Nacional 0; Inti Gas 2 Jose Galvez 1; Universidad SMP 0 Alianza Atletico 2.

PERU – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Alianza Lima	44	22	10	12	58	46	76
Juan Aurich	44	20	14	10	61	44	74
Cesar Vallejo	44	17	16	11	60	51	67
Inti Gas	44	18	10	16	58	51	64
S Cristal	44	16	9	19	71	55	57
Jose Galvez	44	15	7	22	43	59	52
Col Nacional	44	14	8	22	39	58	50
Sport Ancash	44	13	9	22	40	61	48

PERU – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Universitario	44	23	12	9	59	32	81
Huancayo	44	21	7	16	64	57	70
Univ SMP*	44	18	16	10	64	48	69
Melgar	44	15	13	16	59	62	58
Cienciano	44	14	16	14	58	63	58
Total Chalaco	44	12	15	17	62	64	51
Al Atletico	44	12	13	19	44	58	49
C Bolognesi	44	7	15	22	42	76	36

**Tpt deducted for including too many foreign players in squad for a regular season game*

Group winners qualified for Final

Championship Final, 1st leg

Dec 8
Alianza Lima 0
Universitario 1 (Alva 29)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Rivera

Championship Final, 2nd leg

Dec 13
Universitario 1 (Solano pen 16)
Alianza Lima 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Carrillo
Universitario 2-0 on agg

URUGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 1: Cerro 2 River Plate 3.
Dec 5: Fenix 1 Atenas 4; Rampla Juniors 1 Cerrito 0; Danubio 2 Central Espanol 0; Liverpool 2 Racing 0; Tacuarembo 1 Wanderers 2.
Dec 6: River Plate 1 Defensor 2; Nacional 3 Penarol 0; Cerro 1 Cerro Largo 1.
Dec 8: Atenas 0 Cerrito 1; Central Espanol 0 Rampla Juniors 3; Cerro Largo 1 Liverpool 0; Wanderers 2 Defensor 2; Penarol 2 Danubio 3.

COSTA RICA

Brujas' first crown

After just five years in existence, Brujas beat Puntarenas on penalties to win the league title.

EL SALVADOR

FAS too good for rivals

FAS beat Aguila 3-2 in the opening championship Final to win a record 17th league title.

GUATEMALA

Municipal take league

Municipal won their 27th title by beating Comunicaciones 1-0 on aggregate in the opening championship Final.

NICARAGUA

All to play for

Walter Ferreti beat Real Esteli 4-1 to win the opening championship. The team with the best overall record between the apertura and clausura winners will claim the country's solitary CONCACAF Champions League place.

PANAMA

Arabe triumph

Arabe Unido beat Tauro 3-2 to clinch the opening championship – their third title in six years.

Top...Municipal's Martin Crossa

ALGERIA

North African champs

ES Setif, beaten finalists in the African Confederations Cup, won the 2009 North African Cup of Champions, beating Esperance 6-5 on penalties in Tunisia after drawing 2-2 on aggregate in the Final.

CS Sfaxien of Tunisia won the North African Cup-winners Cup on away goals against Ahly Benghazi of Libya.

Dec 10: Racing 0 River Plate 2; Cerro 1 Tacuarembo 1; Fenix 0 Nacional 1.
Dec 12: Atenas 0 Peñarol 5; Rampla Juniors 2 Danubio 0.
Dec 13: Tacuarembo 3 Cerro Largo 0; Central Espanol 1 Fenix 0; Racing 3 Cerro 3; Defensor 2 Liverpool 2; Cerrito 2 Nacional 5; River Plate 2 Wanderers 1.

URUGUAY – OPENING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional*	15	13	0	2	36	11	36
Liverpool	15	8	5	2	31	14	29
Defensor	15	8	5	2	28	16	29
Wanderers	15	7	5	3	24	13	26
Peñarol	15	7	5	3	28	19	26
Rampla Jrs	15	7	3	5	18	19	24
Danubio	15	7	2	6	26	25	23
River Plate	15	6	5	4	24	23	23
Racing	15	5	5	5	25	22	20
Cerrito	15	4	6	5	20	21	18
Cerro Largo	15	4	4	7	15	18	16
Tacuarembo	15	5	1	9	17	24	16
C Espanol	15	2	6	7	13	28	12
Cerro	15	2	5	8	16	31	11
Atenas	15	3	2	10	9	32	11
Fenix	15	1	3	11	10	28	6

*3pts deducted

VENEZUELA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 6: Trujillanos 5 Yaracuyanos 1; Caracas 4 Zulia 0; Lara 1 Esppor 0; Centro Italo 1 Anzoategui 0; Monagas 0 Estudiantes 1; Minerva 2 Carabobo 0; El Vigia 1 Italia 3; Llaneros 0 Tachira 2; Aragua 0 Zamora 0.
Dec 13: Carabobo 3 Monagas 2; Zulia 1 Aragua 0; Yaracuyanos 3 Llaneros 1; Esppor 1 Minerva 1; Tachira 1 Centro Italo 0; Anzoategui 2 Caracas 0; Italia 0 Lara 1; Estudiantes 2 Trujillanos 2; Zamora 0 El Vigia 1.

VENEZUELA – OPENING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tachira	17	11	4	2	25	7	37
Italia	17	11	3	3	26	14	36
Caracas	17	11	2	4	35	14	35
Lara	17	8	6	3	23	13	30
Trujillanos	17	8	4	5	31	21	28
Anzoategui	17	8	2	7	22	19	26
Minerva	17	7	4	6	22	21	25
Zulia	17	7	3	7	27	29	24
Estudiantes	17	5	8	4	21	15	23
El Vigia	17	7	2	8	26	31	23
Zamora	17	6	4	7	19	27	22
Monagas	17	6	3	8	32	32	21
Yaracuyanos	17	6	3	8	20	29	21
Aragua	17	4	7	6	11	18	19
Esppor	17	4	5	8	12	21	17
Centro Italo	17	3	5	9	19	28	14
Carabobo	17	2	7	8	16	29	13
Llaneros	17	1	4	12	18	39	7

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Arabe Unido (Pan) v Cruz Azul (Mex)
Columbus Crew (USA) v Toluca (Mex)
Comunicaciones (Gtm) v Pachuca (Mex)
Marathon (Hnd) v Pumas UNAM (Mex)
1st legs - March 9-11; 2nd legs - March 16-18

MEXICO

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP Semi-finals

1st legs - December 3/4; 2nd legs - December 5/6
Monterrey v Toluca
2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Morelia v Cruz Azul
0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)

Final, 1st leg

Dec 10
Monterrey 4 (Villa og 4, Suazo 47, 88, Santana 70)
Cruz Azul 3 (Rivero 7, 17, Vila 34)
HT: 1-3. **Ref:** Gasso.

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 13
Cruz Azul 1 (Castro 77)
Monterrey 2 (De Nigris 55, Suazo 90)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rodriguez
Monterrey 6-4 on agg

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw

Apaches Club (Com) v Ferroviario Maputo (Moz)
APR (Rwa) v Recreativo (Ang)
Armed Forces (Gam) v JS Kabylie (Alg)
ASC Linguere (Sen) v Asante Kotoko (Gha)
Balantas (Gui) v Difaa Jadidi (Mor)
Benin reps v Africa Sports (IvC)
Chad reps v Bayelsa United (Nig)
Diables Noirs (Con) v ES Setif (Alg)
Djoliba (Mli) v Al Ahly Benghazi (Lby)
East End Lions (SLe) v Esperance (Tun)
Ela Nguema (EqG) v Atletico Petroleos (Ang)
Feilo Star (Gui) v Raja Casablanca (Mor)
Gaborone United (Bot) v Orlando Pirates (SAf)
La Passe (Sey) v Curepipe Starlight (Mts)
Mafunzo (Zan) v Gunners (Zim)
Mbabane Swallows (Swa) v SuperSport Utd (SAf)
Revenue Authority (Uga) v Zanaco (Zam)
Sahel (Ngr) v Club Africain (Tun)
Saint George (Eth) v Al Merreikh (Sud)
Sao Tome reps v Union Douala (Cam)
Sofapaka (Ken) v Ismaili (Egy)
Stade Mandji (Gab) v ASFA Yennega (BuF)
Stade Tamponnaise (Reu) v Ajesara (Mad)
Tempete Mocaf (CAR) v Al Ittihad (Lby)
Vital'O (Bdi) v Tiko United (Cam)
Young Africans (Tan) v St Eloi Lupopo (DRC)
1st legs - Feb 12-14; 2nd legs - Feb 26-28

Byes to 1st round:
Al Ahly (Egy), Al Hilal (Sud), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Dynamos (Zim), Heartland (Nig), TP Mazembe (DRC, holders)

CONFEDERATION CUP

Final, 1st leg

Nov 29
ES Setif (Alg) 2 (Ziaya 14, 80)
Stade Malien (Mli) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Bennett (SAf)

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 5
Stade Malien 2 (Coulibaly 57, Bagayoko pen 55)
ES Setif 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Maillet (Sey)
Agg 2-2. Stade Malien 3-2 on pens

2010 preliminary round draw

AFC Leopards (Ken) v Benks (Eth)
AS Fan (Ngr) v Issia Wazi (IvC)
Atletico Olympic (Bdi) v Warri Wolves (Nig)
Atraco (Rwa) v El Amal (Sud)
Benfica (GuB) v Barakia (Gui)
Caps United (Zim) v Mbabane Highlanders (Swa)
Central Parade (SLe) v CO Bamako (Mli)
Chad reps v Al Ahly Tripoli (Lby)
Costa do Sol (Moz) v UF Santos (Bot)
DC Motema Pembe (DRC) v *Cent Af Rep reps*
El Dragons (EqG) v AC Leopards (Con)
Lengthens (Zim) v AS Adema (Mad)
Miembeni (Zan) v Petrojet (Egy)
Pamplemousses (Mts) v Moroka Swallows (SAf)
Panthere Noire (Cam) v *Benin reps*
Sao Tome reps v Academia Petroleos (Ang)
Senegal reps v FUS (Mor)
Sewe Sport (IvC) v USFA (BuF)
Tersana (Lby) v CR Belouizdad (Alg)
Villa SC (Uga) v El Khartoum (Sud)
1st legs - Feb 12-14; 2nd legs - Feb 26-28

Byes to 1st round:
AS Vita Club (DRC), Cotonsport (Cam), CS Sfaxien (Tun), Enyimba (Nig), Etoile Sahel (Tun), FAR Rabat (Mor), FC105 (Gab), Haras Hedood (Egy), Primeiro Agosto (Ang), Simba (Tan), Stade Malien (Mli), Zesco United (Zam)

EGYPT

Dec 3: Gouna 0 Mehalla 2; Ismaili 1 Shorta 0; Ittihad 1 Ahly 1; ENPPI 1 Mansoura 0; Mokawloon 1 Masry 1; Petrojet 1 Assyut 1; Entag Harby 1 Jaish 2; Zamalek 1 Haras Hedood 2.
Dec 7: Assyut 0 Mokawloon 1; Shorta 1 Gouna 0; Mehalla 1 Entag Harby 1; Masry 1 Ittihad 1; Mansoura 1 Petrojet 3; Haras Hedood 0 Ismaili 0; Jaish 2 ENPPI 0.
Dec 8: Ahly 0 Zamalek 0.
Dec 11: Gouna 2 Haras Hedood 0; Ittihad 4 Assyut 0; Petrojet 0 ENPPI 0; Mokawloon 2 Mansoura 0; Mehalla 1 Jaish 0; Entag Harby 1 Shorta 1.
Dec 12: Ismaili 1 Ahly 1; Zamalek 3 Masry 0.
Dec 15: Shorta 4 Mehalla 0; Mansoura 0 Ittihad 1; Haras Hedood 2 Entag Harby 3; ENPPI 2 Mokawloon 1.
Dec 16: Assyut 0 Zamalek 2; Masry 1 Ismaili 2; Petrojet 2 Jaish 1; Ahly 1 Gouna 0.
Dec 19: Mehalla 0 Haras Hedood 0; Ittihad 1 ENPPI 1.
Dec 20: Gouna 0 Masry 0; Jaish 2 Shorta 2; Ismaili 0 Assyut 0; Mokawloon 1 Petrojet 1; Entag Harby 0 Ahly 1; Zamalek 1 Mansoura 0.

EGYPT	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ahly	15	10	5	0	22	8	35
Petrojet	15	8	5	2	24	14	29
Ismaili	15	7	7	1	18	12	28
Jaish	15	7	4	4	27	20	25
Zamalek	15	6	3	6	18	15	21
ENPPI	15	5	6	4	17	20	21
Entag Harby	15	5	5	5	22	18	20
Shorta	15	5	5	5	19	15	20
Ittihad	15	5	5	5	15	14	20
Mokawloon	15	4	7	4	17	16	19
Mehalla	15	4	6	5	10	17	18
Haras Hedood	15	4	5	6	16	21	17
Gouna	15	3	6	6	12	17	15
Masry	15	2	7	6	14	21	13
Mansoura	15	2	4	9	14	20	10
Assyut	15	0	6	9	6	23	6

SOUTH AFRICA

Dec 1: Ajax 1 SuperSport 1.
Dec 2: Arrows 2 Aces 1; Celtic 3 Wits 0; Maritzburg 1 Platinum Stars 3; Cosmos 1 Pirates 0.
Dec 5: Wits 0 Ajax 2; Platinum Stars 0 Aces 1; Free State Stars 2 Cosmos 2; Pirates 1 Arrows 0; Santos 2 Swallows 0.
Dec 6: Maritzburg 1 Chiefs 3; AmaZulu 2 Celtic 1.
Dec 8: Sundowns 1 Wits 0.
Dec 9: Ajax 0 AmaZulu 0; Arrows 0 Free State Stars 1; Celtic 0 Maritzburg 2; Aces 1 Pirates 1; Chiefs 3 Platinum Stars 1; Swallows 0 SuperSport 3.
Dec 12: Free State Stars 2 Aces 0; Platinum Stars 0 Pirates 1; Wits 0 Swallows 0; SuperSport 3 Cosmos 0; Santos 1 Arrows 1; Chiefs 1 Celtic 1.
Dec 13: AmaZulu 0 Sundowns 3; Maritzburg 2 Ajax 1.
Dec 15: Aces 1 Santos 2; Pirates 0 Free State Stars 0.
Dec 16: Cosmos 0 Wits 0; Celtic 2 Platinum Stars 5; Chiefs 2 Ajax 1; Sundowns 1 Maritzburg 0; Swallows 0 AmaZulu 4; Arrows 1 SuperSport 0.
Dec 18: Santos 0 Pirates 0.
Dec 19: Chiefs 1 Sundowns 2; Wits 2 Arrows 1; SuperSport 3 Aces 0.
Dec 20: AmaZulu 0 Cosmos 0; Maritzburg 1 Swallows 1; Celtic 4 Ajax 2.
Dec 22: SuperSport 0 Sundowns 1.
Dec 23: Swallows 2 Free State Stars 1; Chiefs 1 AmaZulu 0; Cosmos 1 Santos 0.

SOUTH AFRICA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SuperSport	24	13	8	3	45	19	47
Sundowns	23	13	5	5	35	18	44
Chiefs	24	12	5	7	33	22	41
Santos	23	10	9	4	26	13	39
Pirates	24	9	10	5	22	15	37
Celtic	24	8	10	6	33	31	34
Ajax	24	9	7	8	21	24	34
Swallows	24	8	6	10	22	31	30
Arrows	24	6	11	7	21	24	29
Platinum Stars	23	8	4	11	25	24	28
Maritzburg	24	8	9	9	25	36	27
Wits	24	5	11	8	26	32	26
AmaZulu	24	7	5	12	23	32	26
F S Stars	23	4	13	6	21	21	25
Aces	24	4	7	13	17	34	19
Cosmos	24	3	10	11	17	35	19

TUNISIA

Dec 3: Esperance Tunis 1 Club Africain 1; Esperance Zarzis 0 Sfaxien 0.
Dec 6: Kairouanaise 0 Hammam-Sousse 0; Hammam-Lif 0 Stade Tunisien 1; Olympique 1 Bizertin 1; Monastir 0 Etoile Sahel 1; Gafsa 3 Kasserine 0.

GUINEA

Fello Star beat Baraka

League winners Fello Star beat Cup holders Baraka 2-1 in the Super Cup.

TANZANIA

Young Africans win

League champions Young Africans beat Kenyan title holders Sofapaka 2-1 in the Tusker Challenge Cup Final.

Still going...Corica (left)

AUSTRALIA

Corica's double century

Steve Corica celebrated his 200th Australian league appearance with the winning goal for Sydney in their 1-0 victory away to Wellington Phoenix. Defeat for the home side meant that they failed to set a new A-League record of 15 unbeaten matches at home. They now share the record of 14 with their victors, Sydney.

IRAN

Mohammed's mark

Iraqi forward Emad Mohammed's goal in Sepahan's 2-0 victory over Esteghlal took his Iran Pro League tally to 48 and made him the top foreign goalscorer in the competition's history.

Luka Bonacic, who took Sepahan to the 2007 Asian Champions League Final, is the new coach of Mes Kerman.

JAPAN

Endo finishes on a high

Yasuhito Endo, who was voted Asian Player of the Year, scored twice as defending champions Gamba Osaka beat Nagoya Grampus 4-1 in the Emperor's Cup Final.

Brazilian striker Lucas and Takahiro Futagawa were also on target for Gamba, with Naoshi Nakamura scoring for Nagoya.

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Draw

Preliminary round

West Asia section

Semi-final

Al Karamah (Syr) v Al Wahda (UAE)

Final

Al Karamah OR Al Wahda v Churchill Brothers (Ind)

Winners qualify for group stage (Group B)

East Asia section

Semi-finals

Armed Forces (Sin) v Sriwijaya (Ins)

Da Nang (Vie) v Muangthong United (Tha)

Final

Armed Forces OR Sriwijaya v Da Nang OR Muangthong United

Winners qualify for group stage (Group G)

Group A

Al Ahli (Sau)
Al Gharafa (Qat)
Al Jazira (UAE)
Esteghlal (Irn)

Group B

Al Ittihad (Sau)
Bunyodkor (Uzb)
Zob-Ahan (Irn)

West Asia preliminary round winners

Group C

Al Ain (UAE)
Al Shabab (Sau)
Pakhtakor (Uzb)
Sepahan (Irn)

Group D

Al Ahli (UAE)
Al Hilal (Sau)
Al Sadd (Qat)
Mes (Irn)

Group E

Beijing Guoan (Chn)
Kawasaki Frontale (Jap)
Melbourne Victory (Aus)
Songnam Ilhwa (SKo)

Group F

Changchun Yatai (Chn)
Chonbuk Motors (SKo)
Kashima Antlers (Jap)
Persipura Jayapura (Ins)

Group G

Gamba Osaka (Jap)
Henan Jianye (Chn)
Suwon Bluewings (SKo)

East Asia preliminary round winners

Group H

Adelaide United (Aus)
Pohang Steelers (SKo)
Sanfrecce Hiroshima (Jap)
Shandong Luneng (Chn)

Games to be played February 23-April 28

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AUSTRALIA

Regular season

Dec 4: Wellington 1 Melbourne 1; Adelaide 0 Newcastle 2.
Dec 5: Sydney 4 North Queensland 1; Gold Coast 2 Central Coast 1.
Dec 6: Perth 1 Brisbane 1.
Dec 11: North Queensland 1 Perth 0.
Dec 12: Wellington 0 Sydney 1; Central Coast 0 Melbourne 3; Brisbane 0 Adelaide 1.
Dec 13: Newcastle 3 Gold Coast 2.
Dec 18: Brisbane 2 North Queensland 0.
Dec 19: Adelaide 1 Wellington 1.
Dec 19: Central Coast 2 Brisbane 3; Melbourne 0 Sydney 0.
Dec 20: Newcastle 3 North Queensland 2; Gold Coast 2 Perth 0.
Dec 23: Sydney 1 Central Coast 0.
Dec 26: Gold Coast 5 Brisbane 1; Perth 4 Newcastle 0.
Dec 27: Sydney 1 Adelaide 0; North Queensland 1 Melbourne 0.
Dec 31: Central Coast 0 Wellington 2.

AUSTRALIA – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sydney	21	12	2	7	27	16	38
Melbourne	20	10	5	5	31	24	35
Gold Coast	20	10	3	7	32	30	33
Newcastle	20	8	4	8	25	31	28
Perth	20	7	5	8	26	22	26
Brisbane	21	7	5	9	29	32	26
Wellington	20	5	10	5	26	22	25
Central Coast	21	6	6	9	25	20	24
N Queensland	21	6	6	9	23	37	24
Adelaide	20	5	6	9	16	24	21

IRAN

Dec 9: Steel Azin 2 Pas 2.
Dec 4: Foolad 4 Rah-Ahan 0; Saipa 2 Zob-Ahan 1; Teraktor Sazi 3 Saba 1; AbooMoslem 2 Esteghlal Ahvaz 0; Moghavemat 1 Peykan 0; Malavan 0 Shahin 0; Persepolis 2 Mes 0.
Dec 6: Sepahan 2 Esteghlal Tehran 0.
Dec 10: Rah-Ahan 1 Malavan 2; Esteghlal Ahvaz 1 Persepolis 0.
Dec 11: Mes 2 Sepahan 3; Peykan 1 Foolad 1; Pas 1 AbooMoslem 0; Saba 4 Steel Azin 2; Shahin 2 Saipa 0; Zob-Ahan 1 Teraktor Sazi 0; Esteghlal Tehran 3 Moghavemat 2.
Dec 17: Malavan 0 Peykan 1; AbooMoslem 1 Saba 3; Saipa 2 Rah-Ahan 1; Steel Azin 2 Zob-Ahan 2; Mes 2 Esteghlal Ahvaz 0; Foolad 1 Esteghlal Tehran 1.
Dec 18: Teraktor Sazi 1 Shahin 1; Persepolis 1 Pas 0.
Dec 22: Peykan 1 Saipa 1; Esteghlal Ahvaz 0 Sepahan 5; Esteghlal Tehran 2 Malavan 2.
Dec 23: Zob-Ahan 3 AbooMoslem 1; Rah-Ahan 0 Teraktor Sazi 0; Shahin 1 Steel Azin 2; Pas 1 Mes 0; Saba 1 Persepolis 1.
Dec 24: Moghavemat 0 Foolad 1.

IRAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sepahan	20	13	4	3	40	16	43
Zob-Ahan	21	11	7	3	34	21	40
Persepolis	21	8	9	4	31	24	33
Peykan	21	8	9	4	25	20	33
Esteghlal T	21	8	8	5	30	23	32
Steel Azin	21	8	8	5	37	33	32
Moghavemat	20	7	9	4	26	20	30
Teraktor Sazi	21	7	8	6	28	26	29
Malavan	21	7	8	6	20	28	29
Saba	21	8	3	10	32	32	27
Saipa	21	7	6	8	27	33	27
Esteghlal A	21	7	6	8	27	35	27
Shahin	21	4	10	7	25	27	22
Mes	21	6	4	11	31	38	22
Pas	21	5	6	10	22	28	21
Foolad	21	3	10	8	16	26	19
Rah-Ahan	21	4	7	10	23	33	19
AbooMoslem	21	2	8	11	17	34	14

JAPAN

Dec 5: Vissel 1 Jubilo 1; Shimizu 0 Nagoya 0; Sanfrecce 4 Kyoto 1; Oita 1 Omiya 1; Montedio 0 Yokohama 0; Urawa 0 Kashima 1; Kashiwa 2 Kawasaki 3; Gamba 2 JEF 0; Albirex 1 Tokyo 1.

JAPAN – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kashima	34	20	6	8	51	30	66
Kawasaki	34	19	7	8	64	40	64
Gamba	34	18	6	10	62	44	60
Sanfrecce	34	15	11	8	53	44	56
Tokyo	34	16	5	13	47	38	53
Urawa	34	16	4	14	43	43	52
Shimizu	34	13	12	9	44	41	51
Albirex	34	13	11	10	42	31	50
Nagoya	34	14	8	12	46	42	50
Yokohama	34	11	13	10	43	37	46
Jubilo	34	11	8	15	50	60	41
Kyoto	34	11	6	15	35	47	41
Omiya	34	9	12	13	40	47	39
Vissel	34	10	9	15	40	48	39
Montedio	34	10	9	15	32	40	39
Kashiwa (R)	34	7	13	14	41	57	34
Oita (R)	34	8	6	20	26	45	30
JEF (R)	34	5	12	17	32	56	27

Promoted: Vegalta Sendai, Cerezo Osaka, Shonan Bellmare

SOUTH KOREA

Championship Final, 1st leg

Dec 2

Songnam 0
Chonbuk 0
Att: 21,371. **Ref:** Lee

Championship Final, 2nd leg

Dec 6

Chonbuk 3 (Emirho 24, 39, Lee Dong-geok pen 73)
Songnam 1 (Kim Jin-yong 85)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 36,246. **Ref:** Choi
Chonbuk 3-1 on agg

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland (NZ)	3	2	1	0	8	2	7
Waitakere (NZ)	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Magenta (NC)	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Manu Uro (Tah)	3	0	1	2	1	8	1

Group B

Dec 5: Hekari United (PNG) 2 Marist (Sol) 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tafea (Van)	3	2	1	0	7	4	7
Lautoka (Fiji)	3	2	0	1	8	4	6
Hekari United	3	1	1	1	6	6	4
Marist	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

Remaining matchdays:
February 12-20, March 5-7, March 27/28

Group winners qualify for the Final

R (in tables) = relegated

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

Euro clash...Arsenal (in red) and Porto

February 18
AFC Challenge Cup begins
February 18/17
UEFA Champions League first knockout round, first leg (first half of draw)
February 19
Europa League round of 32, ,first leg
February 23/24
AFC Champions League group stage begins; UEFA Champions League first knockout round, first leg (second half of draw)
February 25
Europa League round of 32, ,second leg
February 16
AFC Challenge Cup Final

Famous Last Words

Who said what and why

"If I continue to play as I have these past months, how can Dunga ignore me?"

Delusional or not, Ronaldinho tells *Corriere dello Sport* he is confident of the coach picking him for Brazil in this summer's World Cup finals

"When we score one, Pep Guardiola always wants another and then some more. It was never like that in Italy"
Barcelona's Zlatan Ibrahimovic explains why he was glad to trade Internazionale for Barcelona

"As far as the world title is concerned, we lack both the consistency and the squad"
Mind games or the naked truth from Germany skipper Michael Ballack? You choose

No hoper...Ballack

Aim...Roberto Carlos

"We've been lamentable lately"
Juventus owner Lapo Elkann hits the panic button after his side's Champions League elimination and a number of less-than-convincing Serie A displays

"Along with Ronaldo I aim to write some history here – and that means the Libertadores Cup"
Back in Brazil with Corinthians, Roberto Carlos sets the bar as high as possible

"Our country does not totally appreciate its idols. It's been like this for years"
Ex-Argentina striker Beto Marcico on the half-hearted response of many of his compatriots to the election of Lionel Messi as World and European Player of the Year

"The figures are completely mind-boggling. It's pure lies"
France boss Raymond Domenech denies reports in the media that he pocketed £750,000 for controversially leading *Les Bleus* to successful qualification for the World Cup finals in South Africa. A leaked federation document later proved the numbers to be correct

"I'm completely surprised that we are bottom of the league. I know we are much better than many of the teams above us"
Despite a lack of wages and results, Portsmouth's Kevin-Prince Boateng sees the future as rosy

"It [the sending off] was a very good thing. It's good that [Italy keeper Gianluigi] Buffon signalled what I had done to the referee because it was not pretty. I don't know how I could have lived with it had France become world champions and I had stayed on the pitch"
Zinedine Zidane says he is glad he was dismissed for head-butting Marco Materazzi in the 2006 World Cup Final

Shamed...Zidane

"I have been sentenced but not yet executed"
Real Zaragoza coach Marcelino speaks too soon...he was fired the next day

"He has absolutely no respect at all for us team-mates"
Standard Liege defender Mohamed Sarr slams the disruptive attitude of his club's wantaway Serb forward Milan Jovanovic

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2010 WORLD CUP

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2010 WORLD CUP
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

WELCOME TO part one of *World Soccer*'s Essential Guide to the 2010 World Cup.

This summer's finals in South Africa promise to be one of the most open competitions in the history of the World Cup. A personal view is that more than half of the finalists have realistic ambitions of reaching the Final in Johannesburg on July 11.

Up until now, the World Cup has only been won by European and South American countries – and generally on their own patch. Only Brazil – in Sweden in 1958 and in Korea/Japan in 2002 – have won the World Cup outside of their own region.

On the one previous occasion when the World Cup was taken outside of Europe and the Americas – to Asia in 2002 – the tournament witnessed a series of upsets, from Senegal's defeat of holders France in the opening match, to South Korea's extraordinary run to the semi-finals.

A first World Cup in Africa could produce similarly uncertain conditions. With European and Europe-based players taken out of their comfort zone, the likelihood of further upsets can only increase.

All the more important, then, to have the facts on all 32 qualifiers, from Algeria to USA. In these supplements, we will focus on the qualifying campaigns and the key figures from each team, as well as raising the issues that will preoccupy the finalists in the run-up to the tournament.

Gavin Hamilton, ***Editor***

WorldSoccer **Design** Gary Payne **Production** Nich Hills **Pictures** Duncan Bond

ALGERIA

by Mark Gleeson

End of the drought

The Desert Foxes qualified for their first World Cup finals for 24 years after a tense play-off against Egypt

Returning heroes...the team arrive back in Algiers after their victory against Egypt in Sudan

HAVING MISSED OUT on the last two African Nations Cup finals, fallen alarmingly in the world rankings and lost much of their competitive edge over the last decade, Algeria were never in the fancied frame for a place in South Africa this summer.

The north African nation might have upset West Germany almost three decades ago, won the African Nations Cup in 1990 and been to two previous World Cup finals, but their returns recently have been decidedly modest.

But consistent results through the 2010 campaign, culminating in an absurdly passionate play-off, have seen Algeria qualify against the odds for a third World Cup.

Their triumph over Egypt in neutral Sudan came after the two sides had tied dramatically at the top of their final-round group in the African preliminaries.

The two bitter rivals, who have a past history of animosity, finished with exactly the same points, goal difference and goals scored after six matches and six months of topsy-turvy qualifiers.

Egypt fought their way back into the campaign after being seven points adrift at one stage, before snatching a dramatic goal deep into stoppage time in their final group game in Cairo.

That goal meant Egypt won 2-0 to ensure parity at the top of the group and force the play-off.

Algeria had been seconds away from qualification but, after giving up that goal to Emad Moteab, they appeared to have blown their hopes after overcoming an attack on their team bus before the game in Cairo – an incident FIFA have still yet to act on, despite overwhelming evidence that Egyptian security disappeared to allow an unprecedented stoning of a visiting team by home fans.

> **Algeria are the only country from the Arabic world to reach South Africa and now carry a heavy burden of expectation**

Egypt went into the play-off as hot favourites, but Algeria found previously unseen fortitude and fight and claimed victory – the histrionics of the entire campaign being heightened by a classy volley from Germany-based defender Antar Yahia, from an acute angle, to win the match.

Algeria are the only country from the Arabic world to reach South Africa and now carry a heavy burden of expectation.

However, their side is ironically mostly Europe-born, with Algeria using FIFA's change in nationality rules liberally to reinforce their side.

It has not been easy to marry France-born players with the local talent, but national coach Rabah Saadane seems to have finally created a family atmosphere among the disparate groups and unified his team into World Cup finalists. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
AFRICA SECOND STAGE GROUP 6

31.05.08	Senegal-Algeria	1-0
06.06.08	Algeria-Liberia	3-0
14.06.08	Gambia-Algeria	1-0
20.06.08	Algeria-Gambia	1-0
05.09.08	Algeria-Senegal	3-2
11.10.08	Liberia-Algeria	0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria (Q)	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Gambia	6	2	3	1	6	3	9
Senegal	6	2	3	1	9	7	9
Liberia	6	0	3	3	4	12	3

AFRICA THIRD STAGE GROUP C

28.03.09	Rwanda-Algeria	0-0
07.06.09	Algeria-Egypt	3-1
20.06.09	Zambia-Algeria	0-2
06.09.09	Algeria-Zambia	1-0
11.10.09	Algeria-Rwanda	3-1
14.11.09	Egypt-Algeria	2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria (P)	6	4	1	1	9	4	13
Egypt (P)	6	4	1	1	9	4	13
Zambia	6	1	2	3	2	5	5
Rwanda	6	0	2	4	1	8	2

PLAY-OFF
18.11.09 Algeria-Egypt 1-0

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
TWELVE GAMES
Lounes GAOUAOUI (1,080 mins), Karim ZIANI (1,075 mins)
ELEVEN
Yazid MANSOURI (990 mins), Nadir BELHADJ (986 mins), Antar YAHIA (895 mins), Rafik SAIFI (810 mins)
TEN
Madjid BOUGHERRA (900 mins), Kaled LEMMOUCHIA (900 mins)
NINE
Rafik HALLICHE (640 mins), Rafik DJEBBOUR (638 mins)
EIGHT
Yacine BEZZAZ (306 mins), Rafik HALLICHE (640 mins)
SEVEN
Slimane RAHO (630 mins), Karim MATMOUR (524 mins), Abdelkader GHEZZAL (468 mins), Kamel GHILAS (213 mins)
SIX
Samir ZAOUI (394 mins), Lawsouri DJEDIAT (281 mins)
FOUR
Mourad MEGHNI (243 mins), Hamer BOUAZZA (57 mins)
THREE
Aberraouf ZARABI (184 mins), Nabil HEMANI (34 mins)
TWO
Cherif ABDESSLAM (180 mins), Brahim HEMDANI (159 mins)
ONE
Faouzi CHAOUCHI (90 mins), Mohamed SEGUER (66 mins), Lazhar HADJ-AISSA (1 min)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
THREE GOALS
Rafik SAIFI, Antar YAHIA, Karim ZIANI
TWO
Rafik DJEBBOUR, Abdelkader GHEZZAL
ONE
Nadir BELHADJ, Madjid BOUGHERRA, Karim MATMOUR

WILLIAM HILL ODDS 16/1 to win group 13/8 Kamel Ghilas to be tournament top scorer

The key men

Second finals...Saadane

Rabah Saadane
Returns for a second World Cup, more than two decades after leading Algeria to the 1986 finals in Mexico. The 63-year-old had an undistinguished career as a club coach between his two spells in charge of the national side.

Madjid Bougherra
At the heart of the Algeria defence is this aggressive centre-back who played for Charlton Athletic in England before moving to Scotland's Rangers. The 27-year-old had won 34 caps prior to the start of the African Nations Cup finals in Angola.

Rafik Saifi
Algeria's top scorer in the qualifiers is now 34 years old. He spent more than a decade playing in the French league but now earns his money in Qatar.

Karim Ziani
The best of the France-born contingent in the side, he has extensive club experience with Marseille and Wolfsburg. Widely considered the best player in the squad, providing the passion that rallies his team-mates.

Defensive rock...Bougherra

Antar Yahia
Six years ago, the defender became the first player to take advantage of the FIFA regulations that now allow players to switch national allegiance, even if they had been capped at junior level by one country. A former France Under-18 international, he has become a national hero in Algeria following his play-off winner against Egypt in November.

Danger man...Saifi

The unanswered questions

European support...fans in Paris

Have Algeria already exceeded their expectations?
Beating Egypt may be their World Cup highlight as they will have little hope of achieving much against the likes of England and the USA.

Do they represent Africa or others?
"*Les Fennecs*" (The Desert Foxes) will have much more of a following among the immigrant communities in France and across the Middle East than they will from the continent which provided the platform for their qualification.

Will the team suffer from stage fright on the big stage?
Coach Saadane looked more like a thrilled aficionado than anything else and spoke more of going up against Fabio Capello than his own side's chances after December's draw in Cape Town.

Reasons to be cheerful

The end of a long drought
Algeria's last World Cup appearance was in Mexico in 1986 and they have been poor in subsequent qualifying campaigns.

The diaspora
Algeria draw the majority of their side from players born in France, where facilities for the development of footballers is so much better.

Mexico 86...taking on Spain

Zinedine Zidane
France's greatest player has thrown his support behind the Algerians, visiting the team and offering a boost to morale. Zidane's parents hail from the north African country.

Reasons to be fearful

A lack of attacking options
Algeria have few recognised strikers of the standard that will be required in South Africa – a fact that is evidenced by the solo performance of the 34-year-old Saifi in front of goal in the qualifiers.

Low expectations
They could pay a heavy price if they head into the finals just content to be taking part and satisfied at having managed to qualify, rather than being serious in their outlook and fancying their chances of going through to the next round.

Temperament
It might be something of a cliche these days, but there is still much credence in the propensity of the north African players to lose their heads when adversity strikes.

ARGENTINA

by Eric Weil

Doubts about Diego

Maradona oversaw a chaotic qualifying campaign that nearly ended in failure

Jumping for joy...Gutierrez (top) and team-mates celebrate a goal against Colombia

IT WAS TOO good to be true for Argentina as they made a flying start to their World Cup qualifying campaign under coach Alfio Basile, with three victories, scoring seven goals and conceding none.

Defeat in Colombia followed and a series of disappointing draws, with only a creditable 0-0 in Brazil bringing any relief.

Yet when Basile quit after the 1-0 defeat to Chile, in October 2008, Argentina were still comfortably placed in the top four qualifying spots and Basile said he would keep the reasons for his resignation to himself.

Opinion polls favoured Carlos Bianchi as his successor, but Argentinian FA chief Julio Grondona took it upon himself to appoint the inexperienced Maradona a month later.

A 4-0 home win against Venezuela delighted experts and fans as the attack showed some of Maradona's touches.

However, the new coach's lack of experience became evident four days later when he deployed the wrong tactics in an embarrassing 6-1 defeat at altitude by Bolivia.

Only five more goals were scored in the remaining six games. Lionel Messi was blamed for not playing at the same level as he did with Barcelona, yet Argentina's disorganised team could not be compared to the Spanish side.

Early on, Maradona criticised Juan Roman Riquelme's performances. The midfielder walked away from international football and the team were never the same without him.

Javier Mascherano lost form and other positions were continually changed. In the end Maradona picked 84 different players in eight World Cup matches and five friendlies.

> **In the end Maradona picked 84 different players in eight World Cup matches and five friendlies**

Argentina were extremely lucky to qualify on the last round of matches. Bottom side Peru were expected to offer no threat at home, but after Argentina finally took a 1-0 lead, Peru missed several good chances before finally equalising as time was running out.

Martin Palermo's winner in time added on was offside, but the referee and linesman did not see it in torrential rain.

Argentina still had to avoid defeat away to fifth-placed Uruguay to stay in fourth place and they just managed it with a late goal in a match that could have gone either way.

During the qualifying campaign Argentina had been outplayed tactically by Brazil, Paraguay and Chile – the last two, ironically, under Argentinian coaches: Gerardo Martino and Marcelo Bielsa respectively. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
SOUTH AMERICA GROUP

13.10.07	Argentina-Chile	2-0
16.10.07	Venezuela-Argentina	0-2
17.11.07	Argentina-Bolivia	3-0
20.11.07	Colombia-Argentina	2-1
15.06.08	Argentina-Ecuador	1-1
18.06.08	Brazil-Argentina	0-0
06.09.08	Argentina-Paraguay	1-1
10.09.08	Peru-Argentina	1-1
11.10.08	Argentina-Uruguay	2-1
15.10.08	Chile-Argentina	1-0
28.03.09	Argentina-Venezuela	4-0
01.04.09	Bolivia-Argentina	6-1
06.06.09	Argentina-Colombia	1-0
10.06.09	Ecuador-Argentina	2-0
05.09.09	Argentina-Brazil	1-3
09.09.09	Paraguay-Argentina	1-0
10.10.09	Argentina-Peru	2-1
14.10.09	Uruguay-Argentina	0-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil (Q)	18	9	7	2	33	11	34
Chile (Q)	18	10	3	5	32	22	33
Paraguay (Q)	18	10	3	5	24	18	33
Argentina (Q)	18	8	4	6	23	20	28
Uruguay (P)	18	6	6	6	28	20	24
Ecuador	18	6	5	7	22	26	23
Colombia	18	6	5	7	14	18	23
Venezuela	18	6	4	8	23	29	22
Bolivia	18	4	3	11	22	36	15
Peru	18	3	4	11	11	34	13

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
EIGHTEEN GAMES Lionel MESSI (1,606 mins).
SIXTEEN Javier MASCHERANO (1,413mins), Javier ZANETTI (1,394 mins)
FOURTEEN Gabriel HEINZE (1,208 mins), Martin DEMICHELIS (1,193 mins).
TWELVE Fernando GAGO (770 mins), Carlos TEVEZ (750 mins), Sergio AGUERO (693 mins)
NINE Juan Roman RIQUELME (785 mins)
EIGHT Esteban CAMBIASSO (673 mins), Maxi RODRIGUEZ (410 mins)
SEVEN Jonas GUTIERREZ (556 mins), Roberto ABBONDANZIERI (554 mins), Juan VERON (443 mins)
SIX Juan CARRIZO (526 mins), Nicolas BURDISSO (371 mins), Daniel DIAZ (311 mins), Diego MILITO (157 mins)
FIVE Angel DI MARIA (235 mins)
FOUR Gabriel MILITO (360 mins)
THREE Mariano ANDUJAR (270 mins), Fabricio COLOCCINI (270 mins), Nicolas OTAMENDI (270 mins), Sergio ROMERO (270 mins), Hugo IBARRA (249 mins), Rolando SCHIAVI (190 mins), Sebastian BATTAGLIA (171 mins), German DENIS (45 mins)
TWO Emiliano PAPA (180 mins), Sebastian DOMINGUEZ (170 mins), Gonzalo HIGUAIN (146 mins), Jesus DATOLO (136 mins), Marcos ANCELERI (111 mins), Cristian LEDESMA (108 mins), Julio CRUZ (94 mins), Martin PALERMO (75 mins), Gonzalo BERGESSIO (67 mins), Rodrigo PALACIO (5 mins)
ONE Emiliano INSUA (90 mins), Luis GONZALEZ (69 mins), Pablo AIMAR (76 mins), Enzo PEREZ (46 mins), Ezequiel LAVEZZI (44 mins), Daniel MONTENEGRO (15 mins), Luciano MONZON (15 mins), Federico INSUA (14 mins), Mario BOLATTI (11 mins), Jose SAND (7 mins), Javier SAVIOLA (7 mins), Pablo ZABALETA (3 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
FOUR GOALS Sergio AGUERO, Lionel MESSI, Juan Roman RIQUELME
ONE Mario BOLATTI, Esteban CAMBIASSO, Daniel DIAZ, Jesus DATOLO, Luis GONZALEZ, Gonzalo HIGUAIN, Gabriel MILITO, Rodrigo PALACIO, Martin PALERMO, Maxi RODRIGUEZ, Carlos TEVEZ

WILLIAM HILL ODDS 4/9 to win group 20/1 Lionel Messi to finish as tournament top scorer

The key men

Old hand...Veron

Lionel Messi
Not named World Player of the Year for nothing, but so far has not shown his Barcelona form in the national team – a result of playing in a different position and with different tactics.

Javier Mascherano
Maradona originally said that "my team is Mascherano and 10 more" and though not living up to that description in recent matches, he is expected to recover his form.

Juan Sebastian Veron
The veteran distributes play cleverly from midfield, rarely puts a pass wrong and dictates rhythm, but he is 34 and has had frequent injuries.

Diego Maradona
Argentina's greatest player has never had any real experience as a club coach and it shows. Carlos Bilardo, the 1986 World Cup-winning boss, was named team manager, partly to help him, but Maradona refuses to take any advice and wants Bilardo far away from the field.

Predator...Higuain

Gonzalo Higuain
Maradona has continually looked for a penalty-box predator and seems to have settled on the Real Madrid forward.

Wizard...but can Messi reproduce his club form?

The unanswered questions

Outcast...Riquelme

Will Juan Roman Riquelme be recalled?
FA boss Grondona would like him to, but Maradona and Riquelme are waiting for each other's phone call – and nothing is happening.

Can Maradona settle on his starting XI?
Having chopped and changed his team, it remains to be seen whether World Cup warm-up games will be used to try out further players or find a more settled side.

Will Diego behave himself?
No stranger to controversy, Maradona needs to avoid scenes like the one at the end of the Uruguay game that got him suspended by FIFA at the end of last year.

Reasons to be cheerful

The draw
Argentina's first-round group, with Nigeria, South Korea and Greece, does not seem to be one of the more difficult ones.

Quality squad
Maradona has many top-class players available and they should hit it off as a team at some point.

No pressure
Having flopped when going to the World Cup as favourites in the past, they may do better without the pressure of being among the leading candidates.

Reasons to be fearful

Anything that keeps Messi out of action
Argentina's best player is also their most frequently fouled.

Selection indecision
Maradona has tried out 84 different players since he became national coach.

Decision time...Maradona

Maradona's stubbornness
If he continues to be obstinate and carries on refusing to take any advice from his coaching staff, Maradona could find difficult times ahead.

AUSTRALIA

by Les Murray

Nothing to fear

After a confident qualifying campaign, the Socceroos are riding high

Hair-raising...Kennedy and Australia escaped with a 0-0 draw in Japan

CONSIDERING THE SHORT courtship Australia had with national coach Pim Verbeek, the country's qualification was remarkably successful.

The Dutchman, appointed in some haste after compatriot Dick Advocaat turned his back on a deal he had signed four months earlier, was unveiled as the man to steer the Socceroos to South Africa in early December 2007.

Eight weeks later the campaign got underway with a 3-0 stroll over Qatar in Melbourne, setting a pattern that saw the team win nine of their 14 qualifying games, losing just two, to secure a place in the finals with two games to spare.

Marshalled by veteran Fulham goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer, the Australians kept 10 clean sheets.

But they had luck. They were twice outplayed by Asian champions Iraq, yet still picked up three points against them with a 1-0 win at home and a 1-0 loss away. They also scraped by on a trip to Bahrain, despite being outclassed, when Marco Bresciano scored a winner at the game's death, and they hardly saw the ball in Japan, which was another 0-0 draw.

This worried the sceptics at home who have derided Verbeek for his perceived conservatism and reluctance to unleash the players' cultural bent for "having a go". This, implied the critics, was not only "un-Australian" but was nothing like the days of Guus Hiddink who, though reliant on a solid defence, had a good understanding of the players' attacking instincts.

Verbeek, who by and large inherited the same players, points to some impressive attacking displays, notably in the away qualifier against Uzbekistan and away victories in friendlies over Holland and the Republic of Ireland.

> **The central striker position is Australia's Achilles heel. At least four players have been tried – all found wanting**

The Dutchman uses a 4-2-3-1 formation and rarely diverts from it. He relies on Australia's so-called "Golden Generation", essentially the same group of a dozen or so players who did the job for Hiddink in 2006 when they made the last 16 only to lose to eventual winners Italy on a disputed penalty.

The fear is that, as good as these players are, they are now four years older, most of them 30 or more, and the younger tier is not good enough to replace them.

One key player, Mark Viduka, has retired, leaving a hole in the central striker position that Verbeek has been unable to fill.

This is Australia's Achilles heel. Verbeek has tried at least four players in the position, including Everton's Tim Cahill and Galatasaray's Harry Kewell, but all have been found wanting. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING RESULTS
ASIA ROUND 3, GROUP 1

06.02.08 Australia-Qatar	3-0
26.03.08 China-Australia	0-0
01.06.08 Australia-Iraq	1-0
07.06.08 Iraq-Australia	1-0
14.06.08 Qatar-Australia	1-3
22.06.08 Australia-China	0-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia (Q)	6	3	1	2	7	3	10
Qatar (Q)	6	3	1	2	5	6	10
Iraq	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
China	6	1	3	2	3	4	6

ASIA ROUND 4, GROUP 1

10.09.08 Uzbekistan-Australia	0-1
15.10.08 Australia-Qatar	4-0
19.11.08 Bahrain-Australia	0-1
11.02.09 Japan-Australia	0-0
01.04.09 Australia-Uzbekistan	2-0
06.06.09 Qatar-Australia	0-0
10.06.09 Australia-Bahrain	2-0
17.06.09 Australia-Japan	2-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia (Q)	8	6	2	0	12	1	20
Japan (Q)	8	4	3	1	11	6	15
Bahrain	8	3	1	4	6	8	10
Qatar	8	1	3	4	5	14	6
Uzbekistan	8	1	1	6	5	10	4

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
THIRTEEN GAMES
Mark SCHWARZER (1,170 mins)
TWELVE
Jason CULINA (1,080 mins), Brett HOLMAN (546 mins)
ELEVEN
Luke WILKSHIRE (990 mins), Carl VALERI (855 mins)
TEN
David CARNEY (738 mins)
NINE
Lucas NEILL (810 mins), Marco BRESCIANO (751 mins), Harry KEWELL (738 mins), Jade NORTH (595 mins)
EIGHT
Joshua KENNEDY (490 mins)
SEVEN
Vince GRELLA (506 mins), Scott McDONALD (407 mins)
SIX
Brett EMERTON (536 mins), Tim CAHILL (501 mins)
FIVE
Michael BEAUCHAMP (450 mins), Scott CHIPPERFIELD (406 mins), Chris COYNE (386 mins), Mile STERJOVSKI (241 mins)
FOUR
Bruce DJITE (108 mins)
THREE
Craig MOORE (257 mins), Mile JEDINAK (150 mins), Richard GARCIA (117 mins), Jacob BURNS (107 mins)
TWO
Nick CARLE (83 mins)
ONE
Mark MILLIGAN (90, mins), Michael PETKOVIC (90 mins), Matthew SPIRANOVIC (90 mins), Shane STEFANUTTO (90 mins), Nikolai TOPOR-STANLEY (90 mins), Ruben ZADKOVICH (90 mins), James TROISI (83 mins), Rhys WILLIAMS (77 mins), James HOLLAND (63 mins), David WILLIAMS (27mins), John ALOISI (20 mins), Neil KILKENNY (11 mins), Adrian THOMPSON (10 mins), Kristian SARKIES (7 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
FOUR GOALS
Tim CAHILL, Brett EMERTON
THREE
Joshua KENNEDY, Harry KEWELL
TWO
Marco BRESCIANO
ONE
David CARNEY, Scott CHIPPERFIELD, Mile STERJOVSKI

The key men

Tournament test...Verbeek

Pim Verbeek
A self-evident master in qualification, but his leadership credentials in a World Cup finals tournament are untested.

Mark Schwarzer
A colossus during the qualifiers. At 38, has no Australian equal and exudes confidence through the back line and the entire team.

Craig Moore
Joined Greek side Kavala after falling out with Brisbane Roar, he is vastly experienced and the chief organiser of the defence – an area in which Australian teams are traditionally suspect.

Vital...Cahill

Tim Cahill
The explosive Everton midfielder has been the scorer of the team's most vital goals in a playing system that relies heavily on his sense for ghosting into dangerous positions.

Harry Kewell
Bruised and battered though still brave in the 2006 finals, he is now fully fit and riding on a new sense of ambition to become the World Cup hero his country expects and so wants him to be.

In form...Kewell

The unanswered questions

Missed...Viduka

Who will play centre-forward?
With Mark Viduka having called it a day, the specialised centre-forward role in Pim Verbeek's 4-2-3-1 scheme remains vacant and there's no suitable replacement in sight.

Can Verbeek rise to the challenge?
The coach has been to two World Cups with South Korea, but only as assistant – first to Guus Hiddink and then to Dick Advocaat. This will be the biggest test of his coaching career.

What happens if Mark Schwarzer falls under a bus?
Heaven forbid, for the Fulham keeper has no obvious deputy with anywhere near his experience or ability.

Reasons to be cheerful

They have confidence in abundance
A near-flawless qualifying campaign, plus their 2006 deeds, will have the team high in confidence against just about any opponent.

D for difficult...but Australia won't be easy

The squad has experience
Viduka apart, all the players from 2006 are still there and available. They will be four years older but also that much more experienced.

Opponents could underestimate them
Grouped with Germany, Ghana and Serbia, each foe will probably consider Australia the one team they should beat – and the Socceroos will love that.

Reasons to be fearful

Conservative tactics
Coach Verbeek rarely deviates from his tried and trusted 4-2-3-1 formation.

Ageing squad
The generation of Kewell-Cahill is not getting any younger.

Tough draw
Australia are arguably in the hardest group, with England as a possible opponent in the next round if they make it through to the knockout stage.

BRAZIL

by Tim Vickery

Spirit of Dunga

Having survived early calls for his head, coach Dunga seems to have brought Brazil to peak form at just the right time

Crude...Uruguay's Diego Perez (left) finds a way to stop Robinho

QUALIFICATION FOR SOUTH AFRICA could hardly have been sealed in a sweeter manner: a 3-1 win away to Argentina booking Brazil's place with three rounds remaining. Scoring more goals than anyone else and conceding fewer, Dunga's side finished top of the table in their marathon South American group.

However, there were a couple of bumps along the road. There was a low point in mid-2008 when they were lucky to lose by only two goals to a Paraguay side that played much of the game with 10 men. Then came the failure to win the Olympic gold medal, leaving a perception that Dunga's job was on the line. And that feeling grew when the crowd called for his head during a sequence of goalless home draws against Argentina, Bolivia and Colombia.

But slowly the side was coming together. Despite his inexperience, Dunga proved capable of forging a team with a clear tactical idea and a laudable group spirit.

He retained the 2006 World Cup defensive unit of centre-backs Lucio and Juan, and holding midfielder Gilberto Silva. Around them he made sound decisions in opting for Julio Cesar as his first-choice keeper, Maicon at right-back and Luis Fabiano at centre-forward. And while midfielders Elano and Felipe Melo may have been less predictable selections, few were unhappy with what they produced in the yellow shirt.

More than anything, though, Dunga's Brazil are Kaka's team. Built around the direct thrust, technical excellence and tactical intelligence of Real Madrid's summer acquisition, Brazil's dark period coincided with his absence through injury.

> **Brazil can be devastating on the counter-attack and also carry a potent threat from set-pieces**

With Kaka leading the charge, Brazil can be devastating on the counter-attack and also carry a potent threat from set-pieces. These were the weapons with which they achieved such historic results as the 4-0 win away to Uruguay and the 3-1 triumph in Argentina – with the Confederations Cup victory coming in the middle.

After the Paraguay defeat, Brazil went 11 qualifiers unbeaten – 19 games including friendlies and the Confederations Cup – before going down 2-1 to Bolivia at the extreme altitude of La Paz. This run of results – and the no-nonsense work ethic behind it – cemented a bond between the team and the fans. It was so strong that, unthinkably, Brazil were not even booed when they ended their campaign with another drab 0-0 draw, this time against Venezuela. Hopes are high that World Cup win number six is on its way. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
SOUTH AMERICA GROUP

14.10.07	Colombia-Brazil	0-0
17.10.07	Brazil-Ecuador	5-0
18.11.07	Peru-Brazil	1-1
21.11.07	Brazil-Uruguay	2-1
15.06.08	Paraguay-Brazil	2-0
18.06.08	Brazil-Argentina	0-0
07.09.08	Chile-Brazil	0-3
10.09.08	Brazil-Bolivia	0-0
12.10.08	Venezuela-Brazil	0-6
15.10.08	Brazil-Colombia	0-0
29.03.09	Ecuador-Brazil	1-1
01.04.09	Brazil-Peru	3-0
06.06.09	Uruguay-Brazil	0-4
10.06.09	Brazil-Paraguay	2-1
05.09.09	Argentina-Brazil	1-3
09.09.09	Brazil-Chile	4-2
11.10.09	Bolivia-Brazil	2-1
14.10.09	Brazil-Venezuela	0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil (Q)	18	9	7	2	33	11	34
Chile (Q)	18	10	3	5	32	22	33
Paraguay (Q)	18	10	3	5	24	16	33
Argentina (Q)	18	8	4	6	23	20	28
Uruguay (P)	18	6	6	6	28	20	24
Ecuador	18	6	5	7	22	26	23
Colombia	18	6	5	7	14	18	23
Venezuela	18	6	4	8	23	29	22
Bolivia	18	4	3	11	22	36	15
Peru	18	3	4	11	11	34	13

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
EIGHTEEN GAMES JULIO CESAR (1,620 mins)
SIXTEEN GILBERTO SILVA (1,440 mins)
FIFTEEN MAICON (1,280 mins), ROBINHO (1,209 mins)
FOURTEEN LUCIO (1,260 mins), ELANO (592 mins)
ELEVEN KAKA (958 mins), LUIS FABIANO (801 mins)
TEN JUAN (832 mins), JOSUE (568 mins)
NINE DANI ALVES (553 mins)
EIGHT LUISAO (642 mins), RONALDINHO (544 mins)
SEVEN JULIO BAPTISTA (261 mins)
SIX GILBERTO (540 mins), MINEIRO (510 mins), FELIPE MELO (500 mins), KLEBER (497 mins), ADRIANO (317 mins)
FIVE NILMAR (358 mins), DIEGO (270 mins) RAMIRES (243 mins)
FOUR MIRANDA (314 mins), VAGNER LOVE (231 mins)
THREE ANDRE SANTOS (227 mins), ALEX (78 mins), DIEGO TARDELLI (75 mins), ALEXANDRE PATO (63 mins)
TWO LUCAS (150 mins), JUAN JR (126 mins) JO (94 mins), ANDERSON (78 mins), THIAGO SILVA (68 mins), MANONI (45 mins)
ONE ALEX COSTA (90 mins), MARCELO (90 mins), FILIPE (75 mins), DIEGO SOUZA (46 mins), SANDRO (22 mins), AFONSO ALVES (6 mins), KLEBERSON (5 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
NINE LUIS FABIANO
FIVE KAKA, NILMAR
FOUR ROBINHO
TWO JULIO BAPTISTA
ONE ADRIANO, DANI ALVES, ELANO, FELIPE MELO, JUAN, LUISAO, RONALDINHO, VAGNER LOVE

WILLIAM HILL ODDS 4/7 to win group 33/1 Kaka to be tournament top scorer

The key men

Taskmaster...Dunga

Dunga
Brazil's truculent World Cup-winning captain at USA 94 turned truculent coach has adapted well to his new role.

Luis Fabiano
Came good during the qualifying campaign, scoring nine goals. Was also top marksman in the Confederations Cup. A strong, mobile and uncomplicated finisher.

Uncomplicated...Luis Fabiano

Kaka
Overburdened with defensive tasks in 2006, he now looks ready to make the 2010 World Cup the definitive statement of his international career.

Lucio
Fiercely competitive and accomplished centre-back, he is a captain who spreads the conviction of victory throughout the team.

Commanding...Julio Cesar

Julio Cesar
A giant in qualification, whose confidence seemed to fill the goal. Full of athletic saves and always quick off his line to snuff out danger.

Off the defensive leash...Kaka

The unanswered questions

Recall...Ronaldo

Who is going to play left-back?
Six players featured there in qualification, none of them truly convincing, and another two have been called up since.

Will there be a recall for Ronaldinho?
A huge admirer of the Milan star, Dunga carried him around for nearly three years until his patience ran out. But with the player showing signs of a recovery, and Brazil perhaps in need of a Plan B, the door might still be open.

And what about Ronaldo?
Dunga is clearly reluctant, but playing in the 2010 Libertadores for Corinthians will give the striker a massive media platform to push for a return.

Reasons to be cheerful

All-round toughness
Brazil's squad has strength in depth, as well as physical and mental strength.

A clear tactical idea
Fitting Brazil's gifted individuals into a collective structure can be a problem, but Dunga seems to have found a formula which is efficient in defence and effective in attack.

Experience
Lessons seem to have been learned from the "pop star" style preparations of 2006 when tickets for training sessions were sold to the public. It will not be repeated.

Reasons to be fearful

Their group
For the first time in years – since 1978 by popular reckoning – Brazil do not have guaranteed passage into the knockout stage. Ivory Coast and Portugal carry a threat.

Rivals...Portugal threaten

They can be stifled
Those four goalless draws at home during qualifying are not a coincidence. Brazil can struggle against opponents who do not leave themselves open to the counter-attack.

Weight of expectation
Historically, being favourites has not brought the best out of Brazil and they can get carried away with their own publicity. Dunga will have to persist until the end with his message of "no complacency".

CAMEROON

by Mark Gleeson

Back again

French coach Paul Le Guen has revived the side's fortunes and led the Indomitable Lions to a sixth finals' appearance

Lion-heart...Webo (right) challenges Togo goalkeeper Kodjovi Obilale

THE INDOMITABLE LIONS will compete in the World Cup finals for an African-record sixth time, despite a typically inconsistent qualifying campaign in which they still proved too strong for their opponents.

It is a return to the finals for Cameroonians after the pain of missing out on Germany, where they had been edged out of a place in the tournament by Ivory Coast. It was a campaign that fell apart with a missed penalty by full-back Pierre Wome – a kick whose impact still reverberates through the current squad structure.

However, much of that disappointment was put to bed when a mediocre-looking side surprised even themselves by reaching the Final of the 2008 African Nations Cup in Ghana, and six months later Cameroon got their 2010 World Cup qualifying campaign off to an unbeaten start.

Indeed, they were one of just four countries who went through the first phase of the African preliminaries unbeaten, albeit hardly tested by group rivals Cape Verde Islands, Mauritius and Tanzania.

There was further good fortune in the final group phase, where they avoided many of the form sides and were drawn alongside Gabon, Togo and Morocco.

But an opening 1-0 defeat away to Togo saw the campaign turn from a supposedly easy passage into potential disaster and lead to the dismissal of veteran German coach Otto Pfister, whose tenure in charge always looked as uncertain as his own demeanour.

Thomas Nkono stood in as caretaker for their next qualifier, which was a disappointing home draw with the Moroccans that left Cameroon significantly behind in the standings.

> **Le Guen gambled on alienating the squad by stripping veteran Rigobert Song of the captaincy and handing it to Samuel Eto'o**

Paul Le Guen, the French coach who had recently left Paris Saint-Germain, was sought as a possible saviour, signing what appeared to be a hit-and-miss short-term contract.

Having flopped at PSG, and in Scotland with Rangers before that, it seemed a risky move, but the 45-year-old proved single-minded in engineering a turnaround.

He gambled on alienating the squad by stripping veteran Rigobert Song of the captaincy and handing the armband to egotist Samuel Eto'o. But it proved to be an inspired move which, combined with Le Guen's insistence on top-class professional conditions for his players, helped to rally a comeback.

They won away in Gabon and then beat the same team at home several days later, before victory in their last two matches, including their final qualifier away against Morocco, ultimately saw Cameroon win their group in comfortable fashion. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
AFRICA SECOND STAGE GROUP 1

31.05.08	Cameroon-Cape Verde Is	2-0
08.06.08	Mauritius-Cameroon	0-3
14.06.08	Tanzania-Cameroon	0-0
21.06.08	Cameroon-Tanzania	2-1
06.09.08	Cape Verde Isls-Cameroon	1-2
11.10.08	Cameroon-Mauritius	5-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon (Q)	6	5	1	0	14	2	16
Cape Verde	6	3	0	3	7	8	9
Tanzania	6	2	2	2	9	6	8
Mauritius	6	0	1	5	3	17	1

AFRICA THIRD STAGE GROUP A

28.03.09	Togo-Cameroon	1-0
07.06.09	Cameroon-Morocco	0-0
05.09.09	Gabon-Cameroon	0-2
09.09.09	Cameroon-Gabon	2-1
10.10.09	Cameroon-Togo	3-0
14.11.09	Morocco-Cameroon	0-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon (Q)	6	4	1	1	9	2	13
Gabon	6	3	0	3	9	7	9
Togo	6	2	2	2	3	7	8
Morocco	6	0	3	3	3	8	3

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
TWELVE GAMES
Idriss KAMENI (1,080 mins), Rigobert SONG (1,053 mins), Jean MAKOUN (1,005 mins)
ELEVEN
GEREMI (990 mins), Samuel ETO'O (968 mins)
TEN
Achille WEBO (723 mins), Achille EMANA (536 mins), Stephane MBIA (533 mins),
EIGHT
Alexandre SONG (720 mins)
SEVEN
Modeste MBAMI (526 mins)
SIX
Andre BIKEY (540 mins), Tchoyi SOMEN (272 mins)
FIVE
Nicolas NKOULOU (450 mins), Thimothee ATOUBA (435 mins)
FOUR
Benoit ASSOU-EKOTTO (360 mins), Paul ALOO (181 mins), Daniel KOME (177 mins), Eyong ENOH (124 mins)
THREE
Joel NGUEMO (238 mins), Gilles BINYA (189 mins), Alain NKONG (118 mins), Gustave BEBBE (58 mins)
TWO
Albert MEYONG (134 mins), Eric DJEMBA DJEMBA (75 mins), Aurelien CHEDJOU (64 mins)
ONE
Henri BEDIMO (90 mins), Pierre WOME (90 mins), Joel EPALLE (44 mins), Frank SONGO'O (30 mins), Sebastien BASSONG (27 mins), Nwambo MARCUS (22 mins), Guy ESSAME (20 mins), Hassan SAOJO (15 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
NINE GOALS
Samuel ETO'O
THREE
Achille EMANA, Jean MAKOUN
TWO
Albert MEYONG
ONE
Gustave BEBBE, Andre BIKEY, GEREMI, Tchoyi SOMEN, Rigobert SONG, Achille WEBO

WILLIAM HILL ODDS 7/2 to win group 40/1 Samuel Eto'o to be tournament top scorer

The key men

Strategy...Le Guen

Paul Le Guen
The Frenchman cuts an elegant and athletic figure, albeit surly and taciturn at times, but he has convinced with his approach and methods. His 17 caps for France, however, are no preparation for this African adventure.

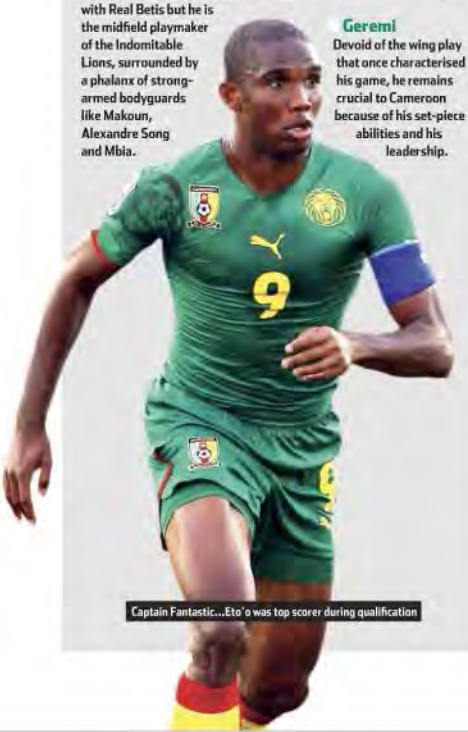
Achille Emana
The Spanish-based Emana might compete in second division football at club level with Real Betis but he is the midfield playmaker of the Indomitable Lions, surrounded by a phalanx of strong-armed bodyguards like Makoun, Alexandre Song and Mbia.

Samuel Eto'o
His charisma, pace and finishing ability are key to the efficient running of the side – even more so these days since he has taken over the captaincy.

Rigobert Song
With more than 100 caps and a record number of African Nations Cup finals appearances, he is one of the African game's elder statesmen yet remains as competitive as ever.

Huge experience...Rigobert Song

Geremi
Devoid of the wing play that once characterised his game, he remains crucial to Cameroon because of his set-piece abilities and his leadership.


Captain Fantastic...Eto'o was top scorer during qualification

The unanswered questions

Joy...the class of 1990

Is this a swansong for an ageing generation?
The team has had a pretty constant look about it for some time, but there are younger players now able to command a berth in the team.

Can they do better than 1990?
Cameroon were the first African side to reach the quarter-finals of the World Cup – a feat never bettered, but matched by Senegal in 2002. Bettering that will be tough given their group.

Will they be organised?
Once infamous for off-field strikes and money mischief, most of that has been resolved in recent times by a more professional administration.

Reasons to be cheerful

The new regime
Paul Le Guen and his assistant, Yves Colleu, have found their approach universally accepted by the players and they have been able to steer the side in the right direction.

South African support
Cameroon were the first side to play an international in South Africa after apartheid and will be heavily backed by the locals.

Experienced players
The likes of Eto'o, Geremi, Rigobert Song and goalkeeper Kameni were in the 2002 World Cup squad and most of the current squad reached the Final of the 2008 African Nations Cup.

Reasons to be fearful

Reliance on Eto'o
The Internazionale striker's goals are the fuel on which his country feeds – but if he is injured or suffers a drought, it is hard to see who else will be able to fill his boots.

Main man...Eto'o (no9)

Defensive ineptitude
There has always been a kamikaze air about Cameroon's defending and put under pressure they are often prone to moments of madness.

Not enough depth
Like all of the African squads at the 2010 finals, there are several world-class players for Cameroon to choose from but others in the 23-man squad have no business being at the World Cup.

CHILE

by Rex Gowar

Back in business

Appointing a highly paid Argentinian coach raised eyebrows, but few question Marcelo Bielsa's selection now

Smiles all round...Chile are in their first World Cup finals since 1998

MARCELO BIELSA has received the kudos for the metamorphosis of the Chile team since he took charge in 2007, but it was the vision of the president of the country's football association, Harold Mayne-Nicholls, that made it possible. He identified the Argentinian as the man for the job and took him across the Andes in the face of an age-old suspicion of Chile's neighbours and the huge size of his salary.

What must have been viewed by many Chileans as a gamble turned out to be anything but. Bielsa set about changing the mentality of the players towards turning out for the national team, and the scientific manner of his coaching won him praise from other sections of society in Santiago.

> **Bielsa set about changing the mentality of the players towards turning out for the national team**

Bielsa's project, based on a group of young talents, naturally took time to bed in, with results in the early matches of the 18-game, two-year qualifying campaign being a 2-0 defeat by Argentina in Buenos Aires, a 2-0 home win over arch-rivals Peru, who turned out to be the weakest of the 10 nations, and a 2-2 draw in Uruguay.

But his philosophy of possession football and all-out attack took a pounding in a 3-0 home defeat by Paraguay in the fourth match before a long break until June 2008.

Two away wins that June – 2-0 against Bolivia at high altitude in La Paz, and 3-2 in Venezuela – were key results that had Chileans really believing in their team. The response to their next result, a 3-0 home defeat by a Brazil side who are masters of the counter-attack, in September 2008, was more important still as they routed Colombia 4-0 in Santiago three days later.

When Chile beat Argentina 1-0 at home in October 2008, their first competitive win over their neighbours, they could have scored several more goals. They dominated their opponents in that first match, which marked the start of the second half of the campaign.

From then on it was never really a question of whether Chile would qualify but when.

They secured their place in the finals, their first since 1998, with a game to spare when they impressively came from a goal down to beat Colombia 4-2 away in October. They finished in second place behind Brazil in the standings of what is effectively a South American championship. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
SOUTH AMERICA GROUP

13.10.07	Argentina-Chile	2-0
17.10.07	Chile-Peru	2-0
18.11.07	Uruguay-Chile	2-2
21.11.07	Chile-Paraguay	0-3
15.06.08	Bolivia-Chile	0-2
19.06.08	Venezuela-Chile	2-3
07.09.08	Chile-Brazil	0-3
10.09.08	Chile-Colombia	4-0
12.10.08	Ecuador-Chile	1-0
15.10.08	Chile-Argentina	1-0
29.03.09	Peru-Chile	1-3
01.04.09	Chile-Uruguay	0-0
06.06.09	Paraguay-Chile	0-2
10.06.09	Chile-Bolivia	4-0
05.09.09	Chile-Venezuela	2-2
09.09.09	Brazil-Chile	4-2
10.10.09	Colombia-Chile	2-4
14.10.09	Chile-Ecuador	1-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil (Q)	18	9	7	2	33	11	34
Chile (Q)	18	10	3	5	32	22	33
Paraguay (Q)	18	10	3	5	24	16	33
Argentina (Q)	18	8	4	6	23	20	28
Uruguay (P)	18	6	6	6	28	20	24
Ecuador	18	6	5	7	22	26	23
Colombia	18	6	5	7	14	18	23
Venezuela	18	6	4	8	23	29	22
Bolivia	18	4	3	11	22	36	15
Peru	18	3	4	11	11	34	13

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING
EIGHTEEN GAMES Claudio BRAVO (1,620 mins), Humberto SUAZO (1,484 mins)
FIFTEEN Matias FERNANDEZ (1,154 mins)
THIRTEEN Gonzalo JARA (1,095 mins), Waldo PONCE (1,091mins), Mark GONZALEZ (868 mins)
TWELVE Gary MEDEL (1,080 mins), Alexis SANCHEZ (1,056 mins), Jean BEAUSEJOUR (816 mins)
ELEVEN Carlos CARMONA (931 mins), Arturo VIDAL (792 mins)
TEN Roberto CERECEDA (641 mins)
NINE Marco ESTRADA (636 mins)
EIGHT Ismael FUENTES (380 mins)
SIX Hugo DROGUETT (427 mins), Rodrigo MILLAR (420 mins), Jorge VALDIVIA (249 mins)
FIVE Manuel ITURRA (295 mins), Pablo CONTRERAS (286 mins), Fabian ORELLANA (25 mins), Mauricio ISLA (214 mins)
FOUR Miguel RIFFO (360 mins), Marcelo SALAS (313 mins), Gonzalo FIERRO (162 mins), Pedro MORALES (152 mins), Eduardo RUBIO (142 mins)
THREE Cristian ALVAREZ (203 mins), Carlos VILLANUEVA (124 mins)
TWO Claudio MALDONADO (118 mins), Luis JIMENEZ (47 mins), Hector MANCILLA (24 mins)
ONE Esteban PAREDES (59 mins), Jose FUENZALIDA (46 mins), Daud GAZALE (30 mins), Rodolfo MOYA (19 mins), Rodrigo TELLO (18 mins), Hans MARTINEZ (5 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
TEN Humberto SUAZO
FOUR Matias FERNANDEZ
THREE Alexis SANCHEZ
TWO Gonzalo JARA, Gary MEDEL, Fabian ORELLANA, Marcelo SALAS
ONE Jean BEAUSEJOUR, Marco ESTRADA, Ismael FUENTES, Rodrigo MILLAR, Waldo PONCE, Jorge VALDIVIA, Arturo VIDAL

WILLIAM HILL ODDS 5/1 to win group 80/1 Humberto Suazo to be tournament top scorer

The key men

Safe hands...Bravo

Claudio Bravo
Goalkeeper and captain who was ever present in the 18 qualifiers, kept on his toes by an understudy voted South America's best keeper of the year.

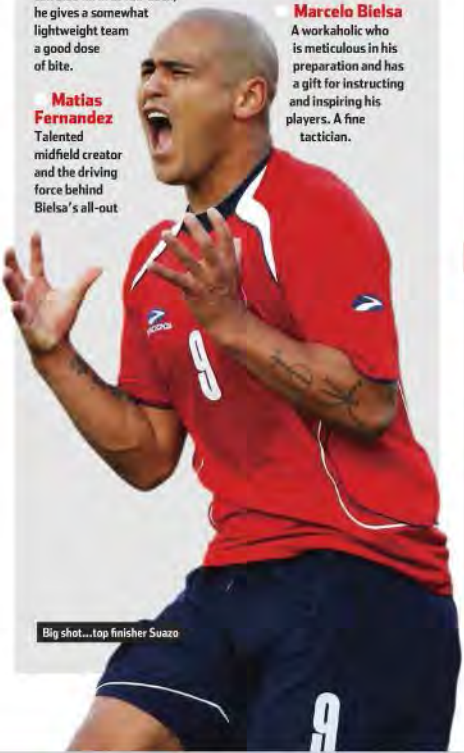
Gary Medel
Nicknamed "Pit bull", a defensive midfielder who can also fill in at full-back, he gives a somewhat lightweight team a good dose of bite.

Matias Fernandez
Talented midfield creator and the driving force behind Bielsa's all-out attacking game plan, in which his team park themselves in the opposition's territory at every opportunity.

Humberto Suazo
A leading player in the Mexican league, he helped Monterrey win the opening championship and was top scorer for Chile in the qualifiers.

Pointing the way...Bielsa

Marcelo Bielsa
A workaholic who is meticulous in his preparation and has a gift for instructing and inspiring his players. A fine tactician.


Big shot...top finisher Suazo

The unanswered questions

Recall...Roma's Pizarro

Can Bielsa forget the 2002 World Cup?
The coach says his failure with Argentina is firmly behind him and will not cloud his judgment at the 2010 finals. He claims he is not looking for revenge.

Will David Pizarro be recalled?
Chile's most high-profile player in Europe turned his back on the national team but could be talked round.

Will Berizzo be missed?
Bielsa's right-hand man, Eduardo Berizzo, was suspended for unsporting behaviour after the team's qualification with a 4-2 win in Colombia in October – a ban which will keep him away from the three group games.

Reasons to be cheerful

Nothing to lose
Chile are a good team who will be able to play without the weight of being favourites to progress from their group or reach a particular round.

Self-belief
Under the inspired leadership of Argentinian coach Bielsa, Chilean players have rediscovered their pride in wearing the red shirt of the national team.

Bielsa's tactics
They now have a coach capable of changing the course of a match from the touchline.

Reasons to be fearful

They have a tough draw
A difficult group, headed by the current European champions and World Cup favourites Spain, it also includes a strong Switzerland side and dark horses Honduras.

Red alert...Chile lose the plot

History of indiscipline
Chile suffered from player indiscipline, which marred their participation in the 2007 Copa America, though that was in the pre-Bielsa era.

Aerial softness
A weakness in the air has been singled out by keeper and captain Bravo as something they have to work on.

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